

SOP 12: Storage and Use of Pesticides, Herbicides and Fertilizer

Introduction

The use and improper storage of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers can contribute to the discharge of nutrients and toxic compounds to the municipal storm drainage system and surface waters. The goal of this Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is to provide guidance on municipal employees on proper handling and storage of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers to prevent the discharge of pollutants from the MS4.

Procedures

Below are procedures for the storage and use of fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides by municipal employees. In this section, the term “pesticide” include products used as herbicides. Refer to SOP 4: Spill Prevention, Response and Cleanup and SOP 17: Hazardous Materials Storage and Handling for information on and handling spills and hazardous materials.

Storage

- Store pesticides and fertilizers in high, dry locations in accordance with the manufacturer’s specifications.
- Store in cool, well-ventilated, and insulated areas to protect against temperature extremes.
- Store in areas that have been constructed in accordance with local fire codes for storing flammable or combustible materials.
 - Flammable products should be stored separately from non-flammable products, preferably in a fire-proof cabinet.
 - Small quantities (less than 500 lbs. or 220 gallons) of pesticides can be stored in cabinets constructed of double-walled 18-gauge sheet metal.
 - Large quantities (greater than 500 lbs. or 220 gallons) of pesticides can be stored in a prefabricated Hazardous Material Storage building or in a purpose-built storage facility. It is not anticipated that many municipal facilities will store quantities in excess of 500 lbs. or 220 gallons of pesticides.
 - Building walls should have a two-hour fire rating and be impervious to the stored materials.
 - Floors should be watertight, impervious, and provide spill containment.
- Store materials in an enclosed area or in covered, impervious containment, such as a locked cabinet. The cabinet should be located in a first story room or one that has direct access to the outdoors. Storage areas should be equipped with easily accessible spill cleanup materials and portable firefighting equipment. Regularly inspect storage areas for leaks and spills. Emergency eyewash stations and emergency drench showers should be located near the storage area.
- For pesticides, storage cabinets should be kept locked and the door to the storage area should contain a weather proof sign that warns of the existence and danger of the pesticides inside. The door should be kept locked. The sign should be visible at a distance of 25 feet and should read as follows:

DANGER
PESTICIDE STORAGE AREA
ALL UNAUTHORIZED PERSONS KEEP OUT
KEEP DOORS LOCKED WHEN NOT IN USE

The sign should be posted in both English and any other language used by maintenance workers.

- Pesticides should not be stored in the same place as ammonium nitrate fertilizer.
- Separate pesticides and fertilizers from other chemical storage and other flammable materials.
- Label all containers with date of purchase. Clearly label all secondary containers. Use older materials first.
- Order for delivery as close to the time of use as possible to reduce the amount of chemicals stored at the facility.
- Order only the amount of materials needed in order to minimize excess or obsolete materials, which require storage and disposal.
- Never leave unlabeled or unstable pesticides and fertilizers in uncontrolled locations.
- Maintain a current written inventory of all pesticides and fertilizers at the storage site.
- Ensure that contaminated waste materials are kept in designated containers and stored in labeled, designated, covered, and contained areas.
- Dispose of excess or obsolete pesticides/fertilizers and associated waste materials in accordance with the manufacturer's specification and all applicable regulations.

Use and Application of Fertilizers

- All fertilizer products manufactured or distributed in the State of Massachusetts must be registered with the Department of Agricultural Resources.
- Perform soil testing before choosing a fertilizer. The quantity of available nutrients already present in the soil will determine the type and amount of fertilizer that is recommended. The soil test will also determine the soil pH, humic matter, texture, and exchangeable acidity, which will indicate whether pH adjustment is required for fertilizer to work efficiently. A soil test should be completed at each facility, as soil type can vary widely within a single community.
 - Soil tests are recommended every 3-4 years for turf and plantings (more frequently for problem or newly planted areas) and every year for soil where phosphorus-containing fertilizers are used. Soil pH tests should be conducted every year for all sites.
 - When collecting soil samples, take multiple samples for each target area at a four-inch depth; mix the samples together in a container and properly label the sample with property information and site use type. Separately sample areas that have discoloration, abnormal plant growth, or other problems. Take the sample at approximately the same time every year. If the area has been fertilized, wait eight weeks after fertilizing to test the soil to ensure nutrients have been absorbed.
- When selecting the optimal type of fertilizer to use on an area, consider the soil test results, type of turf, and type of turf use. Slow-use fertilizer should be used for turf grass.
- Calibrate application equipment regularly to ensure proper application and loading rates.
- Mix fertilizers using clean application equipment under cover in an area where accidental spills will not enter surface water or groundwater and will not contaminate the soil.

- Fertilizers should only be applied by properly trained personnel.
- Never apply fertilizers in quantities exceeding the manufacturer's instructions. Instead, apply small amounts throughout the growing season.
- Time fertilizer application methods for maximum plant uptake, usually in the fall and spring (e.g., between April 15 and October 15). When applying at the beginning and end of planting season, take into consideration the slower uptake rate of fertilizer by plants and adjust the fertilizer application accordingly.
- Never apply fertilizer during a drought, when the soil is dry or frozen, when it is raining, or immediately before expected rain.
- Fertilizer should be applied when the ground temperature is above 55° F.
- Apply fertilizers in amounts appropriate for the type of vegetation to minimize losses to surface water and groundwater. Use the results of the soil test to determine optimal fertilizer timing and application rates.
- Where applicable, till fertilizers into the soil rather than dumping or broadcasting (proper application techniques will depend on the type of soil and vegetation).
- Do not hose down paved areas after fertilizer application if drainage will enter into an engineered storm drain system or drainage ditch.
- Limit irrigation after fertilizer application to prevent runoff (approximately ½ inch of water per application for a week following application).
- Turn off irrigation systems during periods of adequate rainfall.
- Do not over-apply fertilizer in late fall to "use it up" before winter. The effectiveness of fertilizer does not reduce when stored.
- If phosphorus fertilizer is used when re-seeding, mix the phosphorus into the root zone. Do not apply directly to the soil surface.
- Avoid combined products such as "weed and feed," which do not target specific problems at the appropriate time.

Use and Application of Pesticides and Herbicides

The State of Massachusetts has a stringent program for registration of pesticides and certification of those authorized to apply them. Once a pesticide has been approved for use by the USEPA, it must be registered by the Massachusetts Pesticide Board Subcommittee prior to being distributed, purchased, or used in Massachusetts. Pesticide classification in Massachusetts is based on the potential adverse effects the pesticide may have on humans or the environment. "Restricted Use" pesticides can only be sold by Licensed Dealers to Certified Applicators, while "State Limited Use" pesticides may be restricted to use by certain individuals or require written permission from the Department of Agricultural Resources prior to use. Legal application of pesticides must be performed by an individual licensed or certified by the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources. A Commercial Applicator License is required for applying general use pesticides, and a Commercial Applicator Certification is required for applying restricted and state limited use products.

Use and Application of Pesticides

- Pesticides should only be applied by licensed or certified applicators.
- Calibrate application equipment regularly to ensure proper application and loading rates.
- Ensure that pesticide application equipment is capable of immediate shutoff in case of emergency.

- Conduct spray applications according to specific label directions and applicable local regulations.
- Never apply pesticides in quantities exceeding the manufacturer's instructions.
- Apply pesticides at the life stage when the pest is most vulnerable.
- Never apply pesticides if it is raining or immediately before expected rain.
- Establish setback distances from pavement, storm drains, and waterbodies, which act as buffers from pesticide application, with disease-resistant plants and minimal mowing.
- Do not apply pesticides within 100 feet of open waters or of drainage channels.
- Spot treat infected areas instead of the entire location.
- Mix pesticides and clean application equipment under cover in an area where accidental spills will not enter surface water or groundwater and will not contaminate soil.
- Do not hose down paved areas after pesticide application to a storm drain or drainage ditch.
- Recycle rinsate from equipment cleaning back into product.
- Choose the least toxic pesticide that is still capable of reducing the infestation to acceptable levels.
- Use alternatives to pesticides, such as manual weed control, biological controls, and Integrated Pest Management strategies (learn more at: <https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2016/08/wk/ipm-kit-for-bldg-mgrs.pdf>).
- For the use of herbicides, reduce seed release of weeds by timing cutting and pesticide application at seed set. Select vegetation and landscaping that is low-maintenance in order to tolerate low levels of weeds without interfering with aesthetics.

Employee Training

- Employees who handle pesticides, fertilizers, and herbicides are trained annually on proper handling and storage procedures.
- Employees are also trained on stormwater pollution prevention, illicit discharge detection and elimination (IDDE) procedures, and spill and response procedures.
- If services are contracted, the contractor should be given a copy of this and any applicable SOPs to ensure compliance with MS4 regulations.

Related Standard Operating Procedures

- SOP 4: Spill Prevention, Response and Cleanup
- SOP 17: Hazardous Materials Storage and Handling