



Using Pesticides on Forest Lands

A Position of the Oregon Society of American Foresters

The Oregon Society of American Foresters supports the careful use of pesticides that are registered for forest use. When used properly, pesticides are a safe and important tool to protect the health and productivity of forests by controlling competing vegetation, non-native, invasive species and other harmful, unwanted pests.

Issue Pesticides are herbicides, insecticides, fungicides and rodenticides. They can be synthetic chemicals or natural compounds. Pesticides are used in forests to control plants, insects, diseases and rodents in order to enhance and protect the health and productivity of forests. Pesticide use as a forest management tool is controversial. Some believe that pesticides should be further regulated or even prohibited, largely out of human and animal health concerns. However, science and professional forestry experience has demonstrated that careful use of pesticides registered for forest use by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is a safe, effective and targeted method of controlling pests, diseases and unwanted vegetation in forests.

Background Competing vegetation, epidemic levels of insects and diseases, and rodents are significant impediments to tree vigor and forest productivity. Competing vegetation and animal pests can impair the establishment and growth of newly planted seedlings. This can result in unsuccessful reforestation that is in non-compliance with Oregon Forest Practices Act (FPA) rules. Insects at epidemic levels threaten forest health by weakening or killing trees, or by being carriers of diseases that attack trees. Diseases can also slow tree growth or kill trees. The control of non-native, invasive plants, insects and diseases is an especially important and growing issue in Oregon's forests. The use of pesticides is often essential to control the spread of these non-native invasives, as other control methods are less effective or as long lasting. Controlling forest pests and unwanted vegetation helps to achieve a broad range of additional benefits, such as enhancement of wildlife habitat and livestock forage. Pesticides can be a safe and effective tool to address all of these situations.

To ensure safe use, the federal government regulates pesticide use under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA). FIFRA regulations require that all pesticides be registered by the EPA before sale and use. In 1988, regulations were approved that require the EPA to register the active ingredients in all pesticides originally registered before November 1, 1984. In Oregon, licensing and continuing education of applicators are required and administered by the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

The Oregon Forest Practices Act further regulates the use of pesticides in forests in OAR Chapter 629, Division 620, through a number of different rules. One example of FPA pesticide regulations under Chapter 629, Division 620 is a requirement to protect water sources, to prevent contamination of waters of the state. The Oregon Department of Forestry enforces FPA rules and monitors pesticide applications, helping to assure their safe and proper use in Oregon's forests.

The class of pesticide known as herbicides constitutes the vast majority of pesticides used in Oregon's forests. The amount of herbicides used on Oregon forestlands is very small compared to urban and residential, agricultural, and right-of-way use. Typically, only one to three herbicide applications will be made during a forest rotation of fifty or more years. Newer, safer and more effective pesticides and application methods are continually being developed. Pesticides in use today are more selective, targeting the undesirable species better than pesticides used in the past.

With an Integrated Pest Management strategy, the most effective group of treatments is used to achieve the desired long-term results of successful pest control. Pesticides comprise one of many tools available for pest control in forests. Prescribed fire and mechanical, silvicultural, and biological methods, alone or in combination, are also effective pest management tools. Pesticides are an important, effective, and safe management tool for ensuring healthy and productive forests when used consistent with pesticide label directions, and with federal and Oregon FPA requirements. Professional foresters make a significant contribution to controlling pests by developing appropriate pesticide prescriptions.

In summary, the combination of federal and state oversight, professional training of applicators, FPA monitoring and enforcement, continual improvement in chemical development, and adherence to label directions provides multiple safeguards to assure the safe, proper and legal use of pesticides in Oregon's forests.

Selected References

Oregon Dept. of Forestry. January 2007 (or most current version). Division 620, Chemical and Other Petroleum Product Rules. In: Forest Practice Administrative Rules and Oregon Forest Practices Act. Available at local Oregon Dept. of Forestry offices and at <http://www.odf.state.or.us/pcf/pub/default.asp?id=401010207> This web site lists and describes many references related to the Act and Rules, including publications and databases about pesticide use and application.

This position statement was adopted by the OSAF Executive Committee on May 6, 2008. The statement will expire May 6, 2013 unless after thorough review it is renewed by the Committee.