

VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION (VCE) PESTICIDE POLICY STATEMENT #93-001 (revised May 2024)

The registration and use of pesticides are governed by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS). Activities involving the use of pesticides or advising the public on the use of pesticides carry high liability for the Extension Master Gardener (EMG) and Virginia Master Naturalist (VMN) Programs and its sponsoring agencies and partners. This pesticide policy statement has been written for the purpose of helping VCE faculty and staff as well as volunteers working under the umbrella of VCE to reduce this liability. The intent of this statement is to prevent pesticide misuse and/or misinformation, and protect the public and environment from potential harm. All EMGs and VMNs must comply with established Extension policy, and their service activities must be approved by the local unit or chapter before they take part in them.

EMGs are VCE volunteers who work with horticulture and urban agricultural programs through their local Extension offices. EMG volunteers come under this policy because they often provide advice and recommendations for the use of chemical controls for pest species. They might also be involved in pest control in local demonstration plots and exhibits. VMNs are VCE volunteers who work with natural resources and conservation programs through their local chapters in partnership with the program's seven sponsoring agencies and additional local partners. VMNs come under this policy because they often provide advice and recommendations to the public on natural resource issues that could relate to pesticide use, such as control of invasive species. They are frequently also involved in invasive species control in parks and natural areas.

VCE policies regarding chemical pest control recommendations

VCE MGs providing chemical pest control recommendations must adhere to the printed recommendations provided by the pest control specialists at Virginia Tech and made available as numbered VCE publications such as the *Pest Management Guide for Home Grounds and Animals* (PMG). The PMG is printed every year with updates provided by the authors between printings as necessary. VCE MGs must be instructed by VCE personnel or other VCE MG leaders on how to use the PMG. Its use should not involve changing or adding to the chemical pest control recommendations in any way. VCE MGs are **not** permitted to provide recommendations to commercial groups, such as agricultural producers. Some VCE publications have recommendations that are meant for commercial agriculture. Please consult with your Extension agent to locate appropriate VCE publications with chemical control recommendations intended for the homeowner. Furthermore, VCE MGs must be provided with training on pesticide safety and pest control as outlined in the VCE Master Gardener Handbook.

Although there are many other sources of pesticide recommendations available, many are proprietary in nature (e.g. pesticide company literature, the Ortho Problem Solver™) and should **not** be used as a replacement for VCE publications. They can be used as a reference, but any official recommendation to the public **must** come from current, numbered VCE publications.

VMN volunteers do not receive training in pesticide safety nor the use of the PMG; therefore, VMN volunteers may not suggest any specific chemical controls, nor create information (e.g., fact sheets, displays) that includes specific chemical controls. VMNs may state generally that chemical controls may be recommended for certain species, and that landowners should contact an Extension agent and/or Virginia Department of Forestry forester for specific recommendations to match their species, settings, and needs. Similarly, VMNs may provide factsheets and other materials provided by VCE or other agency sponsors that contain pesticide information.

Policies regarding pesticide use as part of VCE volunteer activities

It is possible that some EMG and VMN volunteers could be involved in the application of pesticides in demonstration plots, exhibits, or habitat restoration sites as part of their approved volunteer activities. By state law, these activities are only allowed for the volunteer under two possible pathways.

1. **Certified Applicators and Registered Technicians:** The volunteers could be certified as either commercial pesticide applicators or registered technicians as required by the Virginia Pesticide Control Act. They must be certified or trained in an applicator category associated with their volunteer activities [most likely Ornamental Pest Control (Category 3A), Turf Pest Control (Category 3B) and/or Agricultural Pest Control-Plant (Category 1A)]. New pesticide applicators are required to start as registered technicians. The registered technician requirement involves a minimum of 40 hours of on-the-job training before they can take the registered technician exam. Once a registered technician has accumulated one year in service, they can remain registered technicians, or they may take the category exam(s) to become a certified commercial pesticide applicator. Only persons with one year's experience as a registered technician or equivalent experience or training can become a certified commercial pesticide applicator. To maintain certification, all pesticide applicators must recertify every two years by attending approved training courses.
2. **Pesticide control exemptions; §3.2-3931, Code of Virginia, herbicide applications by unpaid volunteers:** state law allows unpaid volunteers, such as EMGs and VMNs, to use general use herbicides to control invasive plants or noxious weeds on properties owned by a local political subdivision (i.e., city or county). The bill stipulates that unpaid volunteers must have explicit authorization from the local political subdivision and use any such general use herbicides under the direct supervision of a certified commercial applicator. In addition, unpaid volunteers must receive instruction from a certified commercial applicator prior to application on: 1) the risks associated with the herbicide utilized, 2) the proper use of equipment used to apply the herbicide, 3) the proper use of personal protective equipment, 4) other information to prevent an unreasonable adverse effect on the environment, and 5) any other information relevant to the specific herbicide utilized.

If an EMG or VMN is **not** a certified commercial pesticide applicator, registered technician, nor operating under the specific guidelines of state law, then that individual must **not** apply

pesticides in their volunteer role.

Insurance coverage for VCE volunteer activities

EMGs and VMNs are covered under the Commonwealth of Virginia Risk Management Plan while performing authorized volunteer activities within the scope of their volunteer roles. They are not covered under this plan for any activities, including pesticide use or pest control recommendations, that are conducted outside of the EMG and VMN programs, that have not been approved for volunteer service, or that do not follow the programs' policies and guidelines, including the policies described in this document.

Further clarification:

Because this policy can be complicated, there may be the need for further clarification. For more information, VCE MGs and MNs should contact their local coordinators, chapter advisors, or appropriate Extension agents. If further clarification is needed, agents should contact one of the persons listed below:

VCE MG and MN Pesticide Education Program Contacts:

Ed Olsen
Director, Extension Master Gardener Program
490 W. Campus Dr., 407 Saunders Hall
Blacksburg, VA 24061
(540) 232-2136
edolsen@vt.edu

Michelle Prysby
Director, Virginia Master Naturalist Program
460 Stagecoach Rd.
Charlottesville, VA 22902
(434) 872-4571
mprysby@vt.edu

Daniel Frank
Director, Virginia Tech Pesticide Programs
460 W. Campus Dr., 302 Agnew Hall
Blacksburg, VA 24061
(540) 231-6543
dlfrank@vt.edu