



# ***“From the Director”***

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## **Is Your Gardener Licensed to Use Pesticides?**

Maintenance gardeners typically mow lawns and do general yard cleanup. If they also apply pesticides, even occasionally, they must be licensed to do so by the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR).

The requirement for a license to apply pesticides is often a surprise to both the gardener and the homeowner. Licensure is important to ensure the gardener knows how to use pesticides safely for his or her own protection as well as the customer's and the customer's pets. Improper pesticide use on lawns and gardens also can contribute to water pollution that harms small aquatic organisms, according to surface water monitoring data collected for the state's regional water quality boards and monitoring by DPR.

Although only 1,012 maintenance gardeners are currently licensed statewide with DPR, we know there are many more without licenses and are trying ways to reach out to them. We have taken steps to increase compliance with licensing requirements with help from our partners, including the San Luis Obispo County Agricultural Commissioner's Office and the University of California Statewide Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Program. IPM is a combination of natural and preventive strategies that focus on long-term pest prevention and pose a low risk to people, pets and the environment. Pesticides should be used as a last resort and selected to remove only the target pest.

These steps include:

- Created a new licensing category specifically for maintenance gardeners. Other categories were not a true measure of competency for a maintenance gardener who occasionally applies general pesticides that don't require a special permit from the county agricultural commissioner.
- Contracted with the University of California to develop a study guide and exam in English and Spanish specifically designed to help maintenance gardeners obtain a license for limited pesticide use and to introduce them to IPM strategies.

The San Luis Obispo County Agricultural Commissioner's Office was a logical partner for DPR because of its interest in this issue. A 2007 survey by the county found that 82 percent of maintenance gardeners were in violation of state pesticide rules. In 2008, 45 percent of the county's pesticide-related fines were issued to gardeners who fit the description of a maintenance gardener. The county launched a pilot project to increase compliance that is threefold:

- Television and radio public service announcements (PSAs) in English and Spanish to make residents aware they should hire licensed gardeners trained in pesticide safety. The PSAs, funded by DPR, have been shared with county agricultural commissioners statewide.
- A series of workshops and exams in English and Spanish for maintenance gardeners were held throughout the county from late 2009 through early 2010. Of the 196 exams given by DPR, 171 of the gardeners passed and received qualified applicator certificates.
- Continuing education to change maintenance gardeners' pest management practices.

Funded with a DPR grant that ends in June, the county held a series of free workshops about IPM in both English and Spanish to educate maintenance gardeners and retail store employees who sell pest control products. IPM strategies include pest identification methods, alternatives to chemical pest control and information about less-toxic pesticides.

The intent was to train local farm and garden center employees to help maintenance gardeners and other customers make informed pest control decisions. Topics included vertebrate pest control, managing weeds in lawns, and common insects and diseases in landscapes.

Workshops focused on the needs of professional gardeners and counted toward the eight hours of continuing education they are required to complete every two years to renew their licenses. These workshops also offered incentives to encourage attendance, including gopher traps, a hand lens to help identify pests and “quick tips” related to vertebrate pest control in English and Spanish from the UC Statewide IPM Program. These bookmark-size cards attach to a ring for easy reference.

Maintenance gardeners were also provided with sample bags for pests they wanted identified to ensure the appropriate control method is used. These bags could be dropped off at designated sites for identification by a UC Cooperative Extension adviser.

Tamara Kleeman, an agricultural inspector biologist in the Commissioner’s Office who is in charge of the IPM workshops, said the training was well received. “Since this is a pilot project, we’re learning as we go,” she said. “We are in the final stages of the project and are in the process of packaging the curriculum so others can use it.”

The San Luis Obispo County Agricultural Commissioner’s Office also reported that the maintenance gardeners were eager to learn about IPM, underscoring the importance of educating them about these practices.

Stanislaus was the second county to offer workshops and exams for maintenance gardeners. Six workshops – three each in English and Spanish – were held in March and April and emphasized following label directions, regulations, worker safety, notification requirements and protecting the environment. They were funded by a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency grant funneled through DPR. Eighty-nine of the 114 participants passed the exam.

Residents who don’t know if their gardener is licensed to use pesticides should ask to see his or her license or check DPR’s website at: <http://www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/license/currlic.htm>.

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