



FARM COMMONS

Chemical Drift Prevention Tipsheet

LAST UPDATED:
August 1, 2017

FIRST PUBLISHED:
August 1, 2017

DISCLAIMER: This guide does not provide legal advice or establish an attorney client relationship between the reader and author. Always consult an attorney regarding your specific situation.

What actions can organic farmers take to protect their crops from chemical drift?

Farmers who have already fallen victim to chemical drift can check out the tipsheet *Chemical Drift Response: Who is responsible and what actions can the organic farmer take to recover damages from chemical drift?*

“Chemical drift” occurs when the droplets, particles, or vapor of sprayed agricultural chemicals migrate off-site or away from the intended target. In addition to harming people’s health and the environment, chemical drift can damage crops. It can be particularly problematic for farmers who value their crops as certified organic or chemical-free. What can be done to prevent it? This tipsheet identifies proactive ways farmers can safeguard their farm from the threats of chemical drift.

Register with DriftWatch

DriftWatch is a mapping program that allows farmers who grow sensitive crops to register online as a way of letting pesticide applicators know where such crops are located. Eligible crops for registration include all organic crops, as well as specialty crops like berries, fruit trees, market vegetables, and more. The agencies responsible for investigating chemical drift in both Wisconsin and Minnesota (DATCP and MDA) encourage the use of DriftWatch as a way for farmers and pesticide applicators to communicate. The ideal is that applicators will take additional steps beyond their normal procedures if they know that a sensitive crop is nearby. DriftWatch registration is free—<https://driftwatch.org/>.

Let neighbors know you are an organic or chemical-free farm

Writing an annual letter and posting signs can be useful ways to inform your neighbors of your interest in preventing drift. Ideally, this will encourage them to take extra precautions. In addition, if a lawsuit ensues, it will look particularly bad if they knew the adjacent farm was valued as organic or chemical-free and they acted careless anyway.

🗨️ *See if your county has a no-spray list; if so, add your farm*

This is yet another way to be sure that neighbors know they should be taking extra precautions.

🗨️ *Ask neighbors to notify you when they spray*

This will allow you to take steps to prevent or mitigate damage, including covering crops, closing greenhouse doors, and so on. It will also help you know when to be on special alert.

🗨️ *Be on the lookout*

The sooner you know that chemical drift is occurring, the better you'll be able to mitigate damages, as well as collect evidence of harm, if needed. Pesticide application is typically done by plane, helicopter, or tractor. Drift can be seen as a cloud of spray or dust, or smelled as an unpleasant odor; however, often it can neither be seen nor smelled. You may notice plant damage if the drift is an herbicide. If it's an insecticide or fungicide, there may not be any plant damage though the plants could still be contaminated.

🗨️ *Consider keeping bees, and if you do register with BeeCheck*

In addition to the intrinsic benefits of keeping bees on a farm, in Minnesota, beekeepers may receive compensation for bee kills related to pesticides. To be eligible, apiaries must be registered through BeeCheck, so be sure to register for free at <https://beecheck.org/>.

While compensation is not available for beekeepers in Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Pollinator Protection Plan may provide added protection from chemical drift for beekeepers.

🗨️ *Consider defensive farming*

Plant your crops defensively, if feasible, to prevent damage from chemical drift. This may include planting trees or bushes as a buffer zone or windbreak along roads, moving crops over a hillcrest or away from other farms, or growing certain crops inside a greenhouse.