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Spray Drift Caution

As the new cropping season approaches, everyone should be aware of the impact that herbicide drift can cause to off-target crops. Indiana is a highly populated state, and one of the fastest growing sectors is small specialty crop farms, including vegetables, grapes, and greenhouses and high tunnels. High tunnels are usually plastic greenhouses without built-in heaters or fans. These structures allow producers to start growing plants in late February or early March, and many will be in operation by the time burndown and early herbicide treatments are being made to agronomic crops.

While these specialty crop producers should know that corn and soybean fields will be sprayed at this time of year and should take precaution to protect their crops from drift, it is also the responsibility of those who treat agronomic crops to not let their applications drift off target.

A check with the State Chemist's Office showed that complaints from specialty crop growers are on the rise. Of all the spray drift complaints that they received last year, 79% were from applications made to agronomic crops. Of all the agronomic crop drift complaints, 67% were from commercial applications and 25% from private applications. The rest came from a variety



Drift of a bleaching herbicide into a corn field. Pattern is generally irregular and crosses rows.

Spray Drift Caution

of other types of applications including rights of ways, roadsides, and others. These percentages are reasonable, given the way herbicide applications are made in Indiana.

High value specialty crops like vegetables, grapes, and flowers are damaged more severely from spray drift than are corn and soybeans, and have less chance to recover. This is especially true for growth regulator herbicides. Usually the crop is not suitable for marketing. With 6.4 million people in this small state, the specialty crops sector of agriculture will continue to grow. It is imperative that wind speeds and directions be considered when applying herbicides near vegetable fields and grape vineyards. If greenhouses or high tunnels are visible near enough to fields that drift onto or into them is a potential, maybe a good neighbor practice is to tell the owner you are about to spray in order to give them time to turn off fans and/or close the sides of their structures.

Drift will never be eliminated and spray conditions will never be perfect, but doing all that is possible to keep spray drift off high value crops will go a long way toward cutting down on complaints and lawsuits.

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