

The Consumer Labeling Initiative¹

Frederick M. Fishel²

This guide explains the objectives, rationale and process of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Consumer Labeling Initiative.

Do you know of anyone who has:

- Had to make a dash to fresh air after mixing several common household cleaning agents?
- Had a sick pet, or even worse a child, who had gotten into a household product stored in an easy-to-reach place, such as under the kitchen sink?
- Had to return a product because it was not the correct one selected to do the job?
- Drowned an insect on the kitchen floor with an insecticide rather than apply the correct amount to achieve effective control?
- Applied pesticides to the family vegetable garden only to subsequently learn that the product was not registered for use on edible food crops?
- Assumed that doubling the rate of a turfgrass pesticide would be twice as effective and wound up wiping out their lawn?

- Found an unlabeled pesticide container in their basement and had no idea of the contents identity?

This may have been a neighbor or even yourself in one of these or similar situations. If so, it's easy to understand that reading the pesticide label first can save time, money, frustration and trouble down the road.

In 2000, the EPA and its partners in the Consumer Labeling Initiative (CLI) launched the "Read the Label First" campaign to promote the safe use of pesticide products, particularly those used around the home. The Consumer Labeling Initiative, a partnership between the EPA and private industry as well as other federal and local government agencies, has several clearly defined objectives:

- Improve pesticide product labels so that they are easier for consumers to understand.
- Help consumers become more aware of product labels and the information that they contain.
- Give consumers better tools for understanding label information.

1. This document is PI-45, one of a series of the Agronomy Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date June 2005. Reviewed June 2008. Visit the EDIS Web Site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

2. Frederick M. Fishel, Associate Professor, Agronomy Department, and Director, Pesticide Information Office; Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.

Use pesticides safely. Read and follow directions on the manufacturer's label.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M. University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Larry Arrington, Dean

- Encourage consumers to consistently and thoroughly read consumer pesticide product labels prior to purchase, use storage, and disposal of those products.

To undertake these objectives, the CLI conducted research with consumers who used household pesticide products. In-depth, one-on-one interviews with 135 individuals were conducted in each of three product categories – indoor insecticides, outdoor pesticides, and household hard surface cleaners – in five major cities across the United States. Results from these surveys have initiated changes which are being implemented:

- Telephone numbers on product labels. In emergencies, consumers need to know whom to call for help. The goal is to have an emergency telephone number, or at a minimum simple instructions on how and where to get emergency information on every product label.
- Common names rather than formal chemical names on the pesticide labels ingredients statement. Complex chemical names are difficult for anyone to understand. EPA has encouraged manufacturers to use shorter common names for chemical ingredients on their labels. For example, a chemical name would appear as “1-((6-chloro-3-pyridinyl)methyl)-N-nitro-2-imidazolidinimine,” whereas the common name is simply “imidacloprid.”
- On the ingredients statement, state “other ingredients,” rather than “inert ingredients.” Pesticide labels have always identified ingredients as either “active” or “inert.” Active ingredients are the portion of the formulation which kill, control or repel the target pest and must be named on the label. Inert ingredients contribute to the function and efficiency of the product but are not generally named on the label. The EPA learned during the consumer interview process that the word “inert” is not generally understood, and is sometimes interpreted as meaning “inactive” or “water.” To correct this misconception, manufacturers have been encouraged to remove the term “inert” from the pesticide product labels, and to replace the heading with the identification “other ingredients.”

- Change the “Statement of Practical Treatment” to “First Aid.” Most product labels use the heading “Statement of Practical Treatment” to identify instructions on what to do if someone is exposed to the pesticide. Many companies were not aware that they could legally use the simpler, more readily understandable heading “First Aid” instead.

Outreach materials, including brochures on protecting children, pets and the home garden, and product safety posters may be obtained from the EPA's National Service Center for Environmental Publications (NSCEP) at:

P.O. Box 42419

Cincinnati, OH 45242

Telephone: 1-800-490-9198

Fax: 1-513-489-8695

E-mail:

<http://www.epa.gov/ncepihom/comments.htm>



Additional Information

Fishel, F.M. 2005. Interpreting pesticide label wording. UF//IFAS EDIS Fact Sheet PI-34. <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/PI071>. Visited June 6, 2005.

Fishel, F.M. 2005. What are inert ingredients? UF//IFAS EDIS Fact Sheet PI-44. <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/PI081>. Visited June 6, 2005.

Nesheim, O.N. 2002. Toxicity of pesticides. UF//IFAS EDIS Fact Sheet PI-13. <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/PI008>. Visited June 6, 2005.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Consumer Labeling Initiative. <http://www.epa.gov/oppt/labeling>. Visited June 6, 2005.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Read the Label First.

<http://www.epa.gov/oppt/labeling/campaign>.

Visited June 6, 2005.