

## Farm Security - "Treat it Seriously"

### Security for Plant Agriculture:

#### Producer Response for Plant Diseases, Chemical Contamination, and Unauthorized Activity

*Joyce Latimer, Extension Specialist, Horticulture, Virginia Tech*  
*Patricia A. Hipkins, Assistant Coordinator, Virginia Tech Pesticide Programs*

Acts of terrorism have heightened our awareness of the need for security, both at home and on the farm or nursery. This publication and the checklist that accompanies it will help you be proactive with regard to farm security.

Guard against unauthorized access to pesticides and equipment. Identify and report suspicious activity, including:

- unexpected chemical odors in fields, buildings, or work areas;
- unauthorized access to pesticide storage areas or chemical application equipment; and
- unusual pests (insects, diseases, or weeds) or crop symptoms.

Train your workers to be more aware of security as well. Identify the supervisor(s) or manager(s) to be notified if something is amiss. Post contact information for the supervisor(s), as well as emergency contact information for fire, police, rescue, and poison control in an accessible area near a telephone.

Take responsibility for your safety and that of your family and your employees. Be alert to early signs of danger. Report incidents to the appropriate authorities. Prompt action will protect human health and may limit damage. Use the information below to develop a plan for investigating and reporting problems.

### Plant Diseases and Unusual Crop Symptoms

Unusual symptoms in crops may be due to an exotic pest or an unauthorized chemical application. Contact your Virginia Cooperative Extension agent if you detect such a problem. Your agent can help you investigate the crop damage. See your local telephone book for the number of your city or county Extension Office, or visit the Virginia Cooperative Extension website at [www.ext.vt.edu](http://www.ext.vt.edu). Add the Extension office telephone number to your emergency resource list.

Your Extension agent can assist in collecting plant and soil samples, describing the symptoms, and determining the severity of the problem. He or she can submit samples to the appropriate Virginia Tech diagnostic laboratory and help interpret test results. Also, the agent can provide contact information for commercial laboratories if subsequent testing is necessary. If you suspect deliberate damage to crops, supplies, or farm equipment, notify local law enforcement immediately.

### Chemical Contamination

If you suspect chemical contamination of crops, soil, or other areas and/or materials, contact your local Extension agent and your area Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) Pesticide Investigator. In many cases, the contaminated crop or material should be analyzed for pesticide residues. Your local Extension agent can make arrangements for testing. If you have not already met your local pesti-

[www.ext.vt.edu](http://www.ext.vt.edu)

cide investigator, you can identify him or her by calling 804-371-6560 or by visiting the VDACS Directory at: <http://www.vdacs.state.va.us/about/directory-cp.html#pest>. Pesticide Investigators are listed under Pesticide Services - Enforcement and Field Operations. If investigation of a crop or chemical contamination problem determines that there has been a breach of security, contact your local law enforcement agency.

If there is any potential for the suspected chemical contamination to reach surface or ground water, call 911 to contact your local emergency services coordinator immediately. You can reach the Virginia Department of Emergency Services by calling 1-800-468-8892.

## **Unauthorized Activity**

If you observe unauthorized activity, call your local law enforcement agency immediately. Contact them right away to report missing pesticides or pesticide application equipment.

## **Develop Your Own Plan**

Identify critical personnel to be notified of suspicious activities or symptoms. Plan for a backup person. Encourage employees to report problems to these contacts. Develop a manager's list of contacts for emergency response. This list should include the names and/or telephone numbers for the local law enforcement agency, fire department, emergency medical services, emergency services coordinator, poison control office, county/city Extension agent, and the regional VDACS Pesticide Investigator. To avoid terrorist activities on your farm or nursery, or use of your chemicals or equipment against others, take responsibility for their safe storage and security. You are the first line of defense.