Pesticide drift in 1998

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Abstract
Recent weather conditions and poor decisions by commercial and private pesticide applicators have resulted in more drift complaints, to date, than normal. In discussions with Iowa State University Extension field specialists and Charles Eckermann (Pesticide Bureau, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship [IDALS]), it is apparent that pesticide drift complaints are widespread across Iowa. Eckermann reports that IDALS has received 34 drift complaints, the majority coming within the last nine days. Commercial pesticide application accounted for 30 of the complaints and four were attributed to private applicators.

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The windy conditions last week contributed to the drift, but it is clear that the main problem was the decision made by applicators to apply pesticides during conditions that favor off-target movement. Because of the timing, postemergence applications have a greater potential to cause drift injury to sensitive crops, lawns, and gardens (see the June 16, 1997 ICM article, Drift injury to corn and soybean, [1] pages 95-97). Also, many postemergence herbicides have high relative activity and can injure plants at the low rates associated with spray drift. Thus, greater caution should be exercised when considering a postemergence pesticide application.

Although drift is an inevitable consequence of pesticide application, there are a number of factors that will reduce the potential for off-target movement of pesticides to sensitive areas. These factors are reviewed in the March 23, 1998 ICM article, Factors influencing drift potential [2], page 27. Although applicators can make adjustments to sprayers to reduce drift potential, the most important factors are wind speed and direction. If these conditions favor drift, do not make the application.

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