



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

We conducted this evaluation to determine the adequacy of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) management controls for implementing the revised Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act Agricultural Worker Protection Standard (WPS) requirements. We focused on training resources, educational materials and outreach efforts. We also looked at how the agency plans to collect and utilize WPS compliance and enforcement information to track pesticide exposures among target populations.

The WPS is intended to reduce pesticide exposure incidents among agricultural farmworkers and pesticide handlers who use and have contact with pesticides. The EPA established the WPS in 1974, expanded it in 1992, and revised the standard in late 2015. Compliance with most of the 2015 revisions was required on January 2, 2017; and the final three revisions on January 2, 2018.

This report addresses the following:

- Ensuring the safety of chemicals.
- Compliance with the law.

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EPA Needs to Evaluate the Impact of the Revised Agricultural Worker Protection Standard on Pesticide Exposure Incidents

What We Found

The EPA had policies and procedures in place to implement the revised Agricultural WPS. Further, the agency provided training to regional staff, state inspectors and program leads. However, we found that management controls to implement the revised WPS were not fully adequate as of January 2, 2017, when compliance with most of the revised rule was required.

Over 2 million agricultural workers and pesticide handlers are protected by the WPS. Revisions to the standard are intended to reduce exposure to pesticides and provide enhanced protection to agricultural workers, pesticide handlers and their families.

Essential training and implementation materials were not available by January 2, 2017. In addition, two key documents—the *WPS Inspection Manual* and the *How to Comply* manual—were not available when the EPA conducted the majority of its training and outreach activities for states and tribes in 2016. As a result, many state officials said they did not have the time, tools or resources to successfully implement the revised WPS by the January 2, 2017, compliance date. EPA granted a state agricultural association's petition to delay the compliance date until the necessary training resources and educational materials were made available to state agencies responsible for implementing the WPS. However, in a December 21, 2017, Federal Register notice, the EPA rescinded its plan to delay compliance dates. The agency announced that compliance dates in the revised WPS published on November 2, 2015, remain in effect and that the agency does not intend to extend them. The EPA also announced plans to revise certain WPS requirements.

The EPA does not have the ability to collect agricultural pesticide exposure incident data to measure the impact of the revised WPS rule among target populations. The agency relies on information assessed during pesticide re-evaluations and from voluntary reporting databases. The EPA is working on improving its Incident Data System, but the agency stated that the improvements will not enable the collection of additional occupational exposure data.

Recommendation and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We initially recommended that the EPA establish new compliance dates for the revised WPS. However, based on the EPA's December 2017 decision to revert back to the original compliance dates, we rescinded the recommendation. We still recommend that the agency develop a methodology to evaluate the impact of the revised standard on pesticide exposure incidents among the WPS target populations. The agency disagreed with this recommendation, and resolution efforts are in progress.