# CERTIFICATION & TRAINING ASSESSMENT GROUP
# ACCOMPLISHMENT REPORT | August 2009–11

**CTAG**
Certification & Training Assessment Group — National Partnerships for Safe & Effective
Pesticide Management through Education, Training & Competency Assessment

# CTAG ACCOMPLISHMENT REPORT
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# Abbreviations, Initialisms, and Acronyms

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|---|---|
| C&T = Certification & Training | NASDA = National Association of State Departments of Agriculture |
| CE = continuing education | NASDARF = NASDA Research Foundation |
| CFR = Code of Federal Regulations | POINTS = Pesticides of Interest Tracking System |
| CPARD = Certification Plan and Reporting Database | PPRS = Performance Planning and Reporting System |
| CTAG = Certification & Training Assessment Group | SLA = State Lead Agency [for pesticide regulation] |
| FIFRA = Federal Insecticide, Fungicide & Rodenticide Act | US EPA = United States Environmental Protection Agency |

## INTRODUCTION

The national pesticide applicator certification and training program (C&T) was established about 35 years ago to set national competency requirements in states, tribes, and territories for private and commercial applicators when they use restricted-use pesticides. The basis of the program is described in the Federal Insecticide Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) and in the Code of Federal Regulations (40 CFR 171).

## MISSION

The Pesticide Certification & Training Assessment Group (CTAG) was established in 1996 to develop and implement proposals that will strengthen federal, state, territory, and tribal pesticide C&T programs. In turn, these programs will improve the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of pesticide users to ensure safe and effective pest management.

# CTAG ACCOMPLISHMENT REPORT

## GUIDANCE AND TOOLS FOR RECERTIFICATION

The following four guidance documents focus on key elements for a sound and effective recertification program.

### Pesticide Applicator Recertification: Verifying Attendance at Training Events. August 2009.

ctaginfo.org/pdf-documents/VerifyingAttendanceFinalAug2010.pdf

Applicator-certifying agencies should verify attendance at recertification events, whether seminars, hands-on workshops, or online training. Verification enables certifying agencies to assure the public that the people who use and sell pesticides are competent. When someone is certified to apply pesticides, they are trained to follow label directions and their actions are less likely to lead to personal risk or legal liability.

Verification can be accomplished by checking photographic identification for each applicant and then making sure that applicants fully participate in recertification events. When monitoring every person is difficult logistically, sampling may be a reasonable alternative. A systematic and common-sense approach will reduce the likelihood of fraudulent activity.

In the United States, about half of all applicator-certifying agencies use third-party sponsors to conduct recertification training events. The guidance document provides examples of how different states accomplish verification when third-party sponsors are involved.

### Pesticide Applicator Recertification: Content Criteria. August 2010.

ctaginfo.org/pdf-documents/Recert%20Content%20August%2024.pdf

When it comes to recertification, the Code of Federal Regulations does not provide specific criteria for proficiency of commercial and private pesticide applicators. Title 40 CFR §§171.4 and 171.5 specify criteria for initial certification and indicate that State plans must include some measure of continuing competency of pesticide applicators. But criteria for recertification vary widely in terms of both required hours and content.

CTAG believes that states should establish standards and set criteria for recertification.

- Raise level of proficiency for recertification to standards for initial certification as defined in 40 CFR §§ 171.4 and 171.5. Not all standards need to be covered in each recertification cycle, but including the original topics would be appropriate for recertification.

- Cover those standards in greater depth during recertification training instead of repeating what was offered in initial training. For example, conduct hands-on insect identification as part of recertification training, a step beyond merely describing different pests, which would be more typical of initial training.

- Exercise flexibility when setting recertification criteria. Applicators will benefit from topics that go beyond those listed in the CFRs. For example, conduct IPM training.

- Establish criteria for topics that do not qualify for recertification credit. Exclude topics that fail to promote proficiency and enhance an applicator's abilities, skills, and knowledge to encourage the proper use and handling of pesticides, and compliance with pesticide laws and regulations.

- Make sure applicators follow label directions and adhere to laws and regulations during hands-on demonstrations and discussions about research if off-label examples are demonstrated.

### Online Training—Course Design and Structure. August 2010.

ctaginfo.org/pdf-documents/Recert%20Online%20Design%20August%2024.pdf

More and more pesticide applicators are earning recertification credits by taking online courses. As of 2010, 25 states accepted these courses—offered by universities, SLAs, and private companies—in place of other types of training. An ideal course should meet the SLA's requirements for content and have a way to verify applicator participation. An ideal course should be easy to purchase and download. Accessing technical assistance, if needed, should be effortless. Verification is complicated by the remote way an applicator takes the course, so there should be a warning against fraudulent actions such as completing the course under someone else's name.

Course sponsors and SLAs should build in several other features.

- Set course length to be consistent with that of in-person, face-to-face courses. For example, if one recertification credit equals 50 minutes of class time, prevent users from advancing through the course in less time. Develop the course to allow pausing or stopping as needed.

- State the learning objectives at the beginning of each course. Use pre- and post-tests to help the course sponsor gauge how well the learning objectives are met.

- Vary the presentation style to combine visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles. Add quizzes or games to encourage active participation.

- Transfer the applicator's credit information to the SLA once the course is completed. Make it easy for either the applicator or course sponsor to transfer the credits immediately rather than on an annual basis.

- Decide whether to limit the number of online credits during a given year and require other methods of recertification, too.

- Consider evaluating how well each applicator retains information from an online course by possibly following up with the applicator a few weeks after completion of the course.

### Auditing Recertification Programs. August 2010.

ctaginfo.org/pdf-documents/Recert%20Program%20
Evaluations%20August%2024.pdf

Training programs for recertification benefit from evaluation or auditing by SLAs. Most states approve continuing education courses well before the session takes place. Auditing the session ensures that vendors or sponsors offer CE courses as described in their agenda during the approval process. Auditors of live or face-to-face or sessions should know how to perform audits and have a standard checklist to record observations (checklist included in the Appendix). Auditors of online training should review the entire session as if they were the applicator being trained. Audits should indicate whether the training meets the standards established by the SLA, and provide feedback to the SLA and training vendor. The SLA should impose corrective or punitive actions if training standards are not met.

## REPORTING DATABASES

### CPARD 2.0, Certification Plan And Reporting Database (CPARD) Improvements.

cpard.wsu.edu/login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fDefault.aspx

US EPA and NASDA have continued their efforts to improve CPARD, and CTAG has worked with both groups to identify issues with the current version (2.0) and recommend future improvements. The following are a few of the enhancements that CTAG has made possible since release and implementation of CPARD 2.0:

- Added links to POINTS (Pesticides of Interest Tracking System) and PPRS (Performance Planning and Reporting System). POINTS has a link to CPARD.

- Added other reporting capabilities, including:

  - A new total commercial applicators report, or COM Applicators. The new report replaced the previous one by this name, which was malfunctioning. The new report will generate lists of total commercial applicators by US EPA category. The report criteria are year, certification type, and all states or selected regions, states, tribes, or territories. You must also specify how to sort the report (e.g., by region or state abbreviation);

  - A Corresponding Categories report, which lists state categories corresponding to EPA's categories;

  - A Certification Controls report, which lists certification controls by state in a spreadsheet;

  - A Reciprocal States report, which lists the reciprocating states for each state; and

  - A Latest Plan Change, which lists the date of last plan change and approval for each state.

- Fixed the data entry and display scheme for certain sections so that entries with the same repeated value are not displayed or repeated in the database view (which made it unwieldy to navigate); and

- Changed the designation and coding of federal agencies in CPARD and removed them from state reports (they had previously had the same coding designation as states).

## EXAMS AND TRAINING MATERIAL

CTAG works closely with the NASDA Research Foundation (NASDARF) on pesticide safety program enhancements, which includes support of exam and manual development, enhancements and expansion, and visioning for future efforts.

### National Right-of-Way Herbicide Applicator Test Plan and Training Syllabus, November 2010.

In September 2008, Purdue Pesticide Programs[1] began a project to develop training materials and an exam for right-of-way herbicide applicators. The project yielded a national test plan, an item bank of 150 test questions, and a national training syllabus. The syllabus provides an adaptable test plan and offers a curriculum development aid that meets state-specific needs.

Trained item writers drafted the test questions and each question underwent multiple reviews before inclusion.

SLAs can determine which state-specific items to include, the number of items on the test, and an appropriate passing score.

The syllabus, an outcome of the test plan, is intended to support existing training programs for applicators in different states.

### Aerial Applicator's Manual—A National Pesticide Applicator Certification Study Guide, Nov. 2010

This manual, coordinated through NASDARF and written by Patrick O'Connor-Marer, serves as a stand-alone resource, covering topics applicators must know to pass the National Aerial Pesticide Applicator Certification Examination. The manual is based on a national occupational analysis conducted by a committee of experienced pilots and business owners who are actively engaged in aerial application of pesticides. The committee identified the essential knowledge and skills that an entry-level applicator pilot needs to competently, safely, and legally perform all aspects of aerial pesticide application. Together with examination specialist Robert Shaw, a task force developed a summary for the test item bank, the *Detailed Content Outline*. SLAs may request the actual test item bank. The manual follows the format of the National Core Manual and provides state regulatory agencies with tools that can be customized by any state with an aerial category. States may also include local conditions, cropping patterns, restrictions, and state-specific laws in an addendum to supplement the aerial manual. The manual is appropriate for certified pilots as well as entry-level pilots.

## CONTRIBUTORS

### Guidance and Tools for Recertification

| | |
|---|---|
| Pesticide Applicator Recertification: Verifying Attendance at Training Events | Andrew Thostenson |
| Pesticide Applicator Recertification: Content Criteria | Dan Wixted |
| Online Training—Course Design and Structure | Rebecca Maguire |
| Auditing Recertification Programs | Sherman Takatori |

### Reporting Databases

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|---|---|
| CPARD 2.0, Certification Plan and Reporting Database (CPARD) Improvements | Richard Pont |

### Exams and Training Material

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|---|---|
| National Right-of-Way Herbicide Applicator Test Plan & Training Syllabus | Drew Martin |
| Aerial Applicator's Manual—A National Pesticide Applicator Certification Study Guide | CTAG Secretary |

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[1] The project was under contract with the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, in cooperation with US EPA, and in consultation with Purdue University Department of Forestry and Natural Resources.