

## Focus on MCPA and rush control

**BEWARE!** Spraying rushes can very easily lead to breaches of the drinking water standard for pesticides, particularly if using MCPA products.

### Why?

- MCPA is water soluble and takes several weeks to break down.
- Rushes thrive in poorly drained areas (with a water table near the surface) which are prone to runoff to nearby water bodies.

### What to do?

- Use non-chemical control methods e.g. cutting, drainage, sward improvement.
- If spraying, target only the rush affected areas.
- If spraying, cut rushes one month before or one month after spraying to improve the effect of the spray.
- Consider weed wiping with an appropriate herbicide as a rush control option.

## REMEMBER!

- A **SINGLE** drop of pesticide lost to a water body such as a typical small stream (1 metres wide, 0.3 metres deep), for example, can be enough to breach the legal limit for pesticides in drinking water of 0.1 part per billion along 30 km of its length.
- Always read and follow the product label.
- Be aware of how near water bodies (ditches, streams, ponds, rivers, lakes, etc.), drains or wells are to where you are working.
- Find out if the treatment area is in the vicinity of a drinking water abstraction point or well.

**For further information** on related topics such as container storage, triple rinsing, Integrated Pest Management or a list of approved Pesticide Advisors visit:

[www.pcs.agriculture.gov.ie](http://www.pcs.agriculture.gov.ie), [www.teagasc.ie](http://www.teagasc.ie)  
or [www.epa.ie](http://www.epa.ie)

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# Protecting Drinking Water from Pesticides

## Herbicide Use in Grassland

Promoting best practice in the use of pesticides to protect drinking water



## Herbicides\* and drinking water

Drinking water monitoring results for Ireland show that a number of herbicides commonly used on grassland, such as MCPA, are being detected more frequently in recent years. Careless storage, handling or use of pesticides can easily cause breaches of the legal limit for pesticides in drinking water.

**It is essential to take great care and follow best practice procedures when using any pesticide and particularly so in the case of herbicides used on grassland.**

## How do herbicides get into drinking water?

Herbicides can enter water bodies from:

- **Point sources** (mainly in the farm or farmyard) – leaks from storage areas; spills or drips from handling operations such as mixing, filling and washing; or
- **Diffuse sources** (mainly in the field) – inputs arising during or after application from processes such as spray drift, runoff and drainage.

## Weeds in Grassland

Low levels of weeds do not affect grass production and are beneficial to the environment.

A vigorously growing grass sward can out-compete weeds and prevent new weeds growing.

Don't underestimate basic grassland husbandry such as lime, fertiliser, topping or reseeding as weed control measures.

Spraying at the right time doubles the effect of the spray.

## DOs when using herbicides:

- DO** read the product label instructions carefully and plan the treatment in advance, taking care to ensure strict compliance with the specified conditions of use. Follow all health and safety instructions.
- DO** inform yourself of the location of all nearby water bodies (ditches, streams, ponds, rivers, lakes and springs).
- DO** find out if any groundwater body or surface water body in your locality is used as a drinking water source and, if so, the location of the nearest abstraction point. Ensure compliance with the safeguard (no-use) zones around drinking water abstraction points.
- DO** ensure that pesticide products are stored in a secure, dry area which cannot result in accidental leaks or spills. Empty, triple-rinsed containers should be disposed of in accordance with the Good Practice Guide for Empty Pesticide Containers.
- DO** ensure that application equipment is properly calibrated and in good working order.
- DO** take every precaution during mixing and preparation to avoid spills and drips. Minimise water volumes (rain and washings) on the handling area.
- DO** consider using drift-reducing nozzles if spraying. Keep the spray boom as low as possible to the ground and use the coarsest appropriate spray quality.
- DO** clean and wash down the sprayer at the end of the day, preferably in the field and well away from water bodies or open drains. Tank washings should be sprayed onto the previously sprayed area, on a section far away from any water body, observing the maximum dose for that area.

\* Herbicides are one of a number of pest control agents encompassed by the broad term 'pesticides'. The term also covers various other agents such as fungicides, insecticides, seed dressings and rodenticides.

## DON'Ts when using herbicides:

- DON'T** perform handling operations (filling, mixing or washing the sprayer) near water bodies, open drains or well heads. Maintain a distance of at least 10 metres and preferably 50 metres, where possible.
- DON'T** fill the sprayer directly from a water body.
- DON'T** spray if the grass is wet or if heavy rain is forecast within 48 hours after application. DON'T spray during windy conditions.
- DON'T** spray near open drains, wells or springs.
- DON'T** spray on waterlogged or poorly draining soils that slope steeply towards a water body, drain, well or on any other vulnerable area that leads directly to water.
- DON'T** discard sprayer washings down a drain or onto an area from which they can readily enter a water body.

## ! Safeguard Zones !

Statutory 'no-use' zones (called safeguard zones) apply around drinking water abstraction points, ranging from 5 metres to 200 metres depending on the size of the supply. Your Local Authority or The National Federation of Group Water Schemes can advise on this.