Managing chemical spills

Whenever pesticides are stored or handled, there is a possibility of a chemical spill. These spills may be relatively minor, such as a leaking container, or could involve a major accident. They could also be associated with equipment failure where the contents of a fully loaded spray tank are suddenly released.

When a chemical spill occurs, there are five steps to be taken:

(a) control the source of the spill;
(b) contain the spill;
(c) isolate the area concerned (if appropriate);
(d) contact the authorities (if appropriate); then
(e) clean up the spill.

Control the source of the spill
Advice on how to manage a spill is included in the Material Data Safety Sheet (MSDS).
Wherever practical, take immediate steps to stop the leakage and/or control the spill.
Put small leaking containers into larger containers or bins to prevent further release of the chemical.
If a spray hose bursts, turn off the appropriate valves to stop further chemical loss.
Clean up the spill

1. General

Where appropriate, spread absorbent material over the contaminated area. Place this material in a drum or other suitable container lined with a heavy duty plastic bag.

2. Soil contamination

Where soil has been contaminated by a severe spill, remove the contaminated soil and dispose of it at a proper disposal site. Cover the area with at least 5 cms of lime, and then with fresh topsoil.

Where minor spills result in soil contamination, activated charcoal applied immediately to the contaminated site can often reduce soil contamination and subsequent plant damage.

3. Cleaning of equipment and vehicles

Clean all vehicles and equipment contaminated in the original accident or in the cleanup procedure. Make sure you wear adequate protective clothing to avoid personal contact with the chemical.

To clean your equipment only use household bleach (dilute to 50% of normal strength) or an alkaline detergent (e.g. dishwasher soap) solution. Do not mix bleach and alkaline detergents together.