



**Press Release
30 November 2009**

VI WARNING: Pay close attention to rainfall and wet soils

As soils across much of the UK reach field capacity, The Voluntary Initiative is warning farmers to pay close attention to soil and weather conditions this autumn to avoid pesticides reaching water.

Apart from the East of England, most soils are at field capacity with drains beginning to run. This means any additional rainfall may result in recently applied pesticides moving through the soil profile to field drains and water courses.

“Where soils are at field capacity, farmers who want to apply sprays should be paying special attention to weather forecasts,” says VI Pilot Catchment Manager Nick Humphrey. “If heavy rainfall is likely in the 48 hours after application then the risk of pesticides being washed into drains and water courses is high. Similarly, if drains are actually running, spraying should be postponed.”

In the East of England, many fields still have deep cracking from the summer drought. Where these conditions exist, the VI advice to farmers is to delay spraying until these cracks close up.

“Deep cracks result in by-pass flow, rapidly channelling pesticides to field drains so spraying deeply cracked land should be avoided,” says VI Manager Patrick Goldsworthy.

Autumn-applied herbicides pose a particular problem. In recent years, there have been many instances of leading cereal and oilseed rape herbicides being detected in raw water at levels significantly above 0.1ppb. This causes problems for water companies who have to meet the 0.1ppb Drinking Water standard.

“To protect these weedkillers it is vital that everyone takes great care in deciding when, or if, to spray,” says Mr Goldsworthy. “Given the catchy nature of this time of year, there has to be a compromise. But paying attention to weather forecasts, soil conditions and drain flow, coupled with the observation of buffer strips or no spray zones alongside any water course should help reduce the risk of pesticides reaching water. The CPA’s Water Protection Advice Sheets can help farmers evaluate the risks.”

Best practice advice on water protection is being promoted by the VI and the Crop Protection Association (CPA) in partnership with the England Catchment Sensitive Farming Delivery Initiative. Further advice including Water Protection Advice Sheets (WPAS) on carbetamide, chlorotoluron, clopyralid, propyzamide, metazachlor and mecoprop-p can be found in the VI’s H₂OK? Water Protection Advice Booklet, these can be obtained from the library at www.voluntaryinitiative.org.uk.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

1. The sponsors of the Voluntary Initiative are the Agricultural Engineers Association, Agricultural Industries Confederation, Country Land and Business Association, Crop Protection Association, National Association of Agricultural Contractors, the NFU, NFU Scotland and the Ulster Farmers Union.
2. The Crop Protection Association represents companies in the UK engaged in the manufacture, formulation and supply of crop protection products for use in agriculture, horticulture, forestry, home gardening, industrial, and local authority outlets. www.cropprotection.org.uk
3. The England Catchment Sensitive Farming Delivery Initiative (ECSFDI) is a partnership project between Defra, Environment Agency and Natural England which offers advice and support to farmers to reduce diffuse water pollution from agriculture. For further information see <http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/landmanage/water/csf/>

Further information

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