

# NSW Farm Safety Advisory Program



## Paraquat

The content in this article is credited to:

Paraquat information centre - <https://www.paraquat.com/en/safety> (January 2023)

Across NSW many crop producers are currently spraying fallows and many graziers are cleaning pastures with various herbicides including paraquat. Whilst paraquat is relatively cheap, easy to acquire and effective, it presents some significant health hazards and risks, and can cause death, if it is not stored or used appropriately.

Paraquat – also known as Gramoxone or Sprayseed – is a chemical herbicide that is highly toxic to humans and animals.

It is registered as a schedule 7 poison and should only be purchased and used by appropriately trained staff (AQF3).

While paraquat poisonings in Australia are relatively rare, serious illness or death can be caused by ingesting even a small amount of paraquat. In 2012, a farmer died due to accidental ingestion of the chemical. According to the [news report](#), the farmer was filling a pressure pump to control weeds on his property. The unit cracked and paraquat sprayed over his body and face, entering his mouth.

The most common methods of accidental paraquat poisoning are through ingestion, inhalation and absorption through skin exposure (where the skin is broken due to cut, sore or rash).

## **Use, handle and store hazardous chemicals safely**

It is extremely important to ensure that appropriate safety measures are in place when using paraquat on farm and that applications of paraquat are only performed by trained individuals.

You must manage risks to health or safety when using, handling, generating or storing hazardous chemicals at the workplace.

Paraquat can be deadly.

Make sure you:

- Get the Safety Data Sheet (SDS) from the manufacturer and follow the instructions to safely use, store, handle and dispose of the hazardous chemical
- Add the SDS to your hazardous chemical register
- Train and instruct your workers about how to use, store and handle the product
- Make sure you have sufficient PPE as identified in the SDS and that workers have access to it and use it properly

## **How to prevent paraquat poisoning**

There is no antidote for paraquat poisoning, so prevention is key.

Consider substituting paraquat with another chemical that has lower toxicity.

Refer to the SDS and label's specific directions for each brand of paraquat.

### **1. Exercise caution at all times**

- Be aware of the risks involved in applying crop protection products
- Use a systematic approach to measuring and mixing concentrated product, spraying and post-spraying cleaning procedures.
- Keep children and animals away from spraying sites and operations.

- Store product and application equipment safely.
- Never put paraquat in a container that is not designed for pesticide use (beverage containers, *etc.*)
- Dispose of waste product and packaging materials properly.
- Assess weather conditions (wind speed and direction, temperature).
- Avoid drift.
- No smoking, eating, or drinking whilst handling.

## 2. Read and understand the product label

- Users and advisors must read all the information on the product label (technical, usage and safety) and note explanations of international hazard symbols before use.
- Comprehensive pictograms are provided to assist users who have reading difficulties. illiterate users and advisors should understand the meanings of the pictograms on the label.

## 3. Wash after spraying

- Wash thoroughly (shower or bath) after the task.
- Wash work clothes and personal protective equipment (PPE) thoroughly and separately from other household laundry.
- Wash immediately if a spill occurs, paying particular attention to eye contamination.

## 4. Maintain sprayer

- Understand how a sprayer works and identify why and where leaks can occur if the machine is not well maintained.
- Select correct nozzles.
- Follow sprayer maintenance schedules (seals, filters, pumps and nozzles).
- Know how to repair a sprayer and stock spare parts.
- Calibrate sprayers to apply recommended rates.

## 5. Use personal protective clothing and equipment (PPE)

- Minimum requirement for any pesticide related activity is a long-sleeved shirt, a pair of trousers (cotton) and non-absorbent footwear.
- Wear gloves, hats, masks, eye protection and waterproof aprons as prescribed in the SDS.
- PPE is essential, but should be seen as the last line of defence to reduce exposure.

### **What to do if you suspect paraquat exposure on farm?**

Paraquat poisoning is a fast process, and symptoms develop quickly.

Symptoms of paraquat poisoning may include confusion, muscle weakness, nausea, abdominal pain, vomiting, seizures, respiratory failure and difficulty breathing.

The poisons information hotline, **13 11 26**, is available to provide information and guidance if you suspect you or anyone on the farm has been exposed to paraquat poisoning.

Follow the first aid instructions in the SDS. Contact the emergency contact identified in the SDS for advice and provide a copy of the SDS when seeking medical treatment. This will help the medical team treat you swiftly.

Immediate emergency medical attention is strongly advisable. If you have ingested food that has been contaminated with paraquat, , take it with you to the hospital for testing.

Click [here](#) for further information from Healthline on how paraquat poisoning may be diagnosed and treated.

Farm owners are reminded that they must have an emergency response plan in place. Click [here](#) for further information from SafeWork NSW on developing emergency plans and [incident notification](#) requirements.

## Source:

- [Healthline](#)
- [Syngenta](#)

## Further Information:

### SafeWork NSW

- [Managing The Risks Of Hazardous Chemicals In The Workplace](#)
- [Chemical Register Template](#)
- [Placarding for Storage of Hazardous Chemicals](#)
- [Notification of Hazardous Chemicals](#)
- [Personal Protective Equipment](#)

Click [here](#) to contact a **NSW Farm Safety Advisor**.

Visit [www.safework.nsw.gov.au](http://www.safework.nsw.gov.au) or call 13 10 50 to have a chat with an inspector.

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