Meeting the Need for CEUs Using Videos by Appointment

MARY BETH HENRY*

University of Florida, IFAS, Polk County Extension, Bartow, FL

Although many Horticultural Extension Agents have responsibility to provide pesticide applicator training in multiple disciplines, a lack of expertise in some categories may leave an Extension office with little to offer for pesticide applicator training in certain areas. While large-scale statewide meetings offer excellent networking and vendor information, many public departments are simply out of funds for travel. Advances in online offerings have expanded the opportunities for training approved for pesticide applicator CEUs; however, these options require internet access and the ability to comfortably operate computers and software, a skill that many applicators lack. Videos approved for CEUs may help to bridge the gap between Agent expertise and the needs of the applicator. The University of Florida Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants has several published video sets that can be used to offer CEUs in meetings or by appointment (Fig. 1). This option allows less computer literate applicators to renew their licenses without traveling out of the county and without waiting for a regional event. These videos have been offered in Hillsborough and Polk counties since 2009. Manatee County was recently added to increase the training options for pesticide applicators in that area. Offering these and other videos for CEUs by appointment meets the need of the applicator and allows the Agent to focus on their expertise. It also helps to fill the need of the day after the event caller still looking for CEUs and some videos may also be helpful to prepare for exams. As offered, there is currently no charge for this service. Fewer than 100 applicators per year participate; however, those attending routinely drive from several counties away to take advantage of the valuable opportunity. This service assists applicators to avoid retaking very difficult exams, such as the one for aquatics, and supports the employment and maintenance of the credentials of the industries served, primarily land and water maintenance services. CEUs by videos offered at this time include: Aquatics, Private Applicator, Core, Ornamental and Turf, Lawn and Ornamental, Limited Lawn and Ornamental, and Limited Commercial Maintenance. Agents considering adopting this program should consider their ability to schedule individual or very small groups of applicators and their access to space and equipment to play videos. Some recently published educational modules can only be played on computers and require the applicator to advance the module by responding to prompts. This requires a computer available for use and can also present a challenge for the computer-illiterate applicator. Allowing the general public to use an office computer presents other difficulties, such as regular maintenance and repair of issues related to inexperienced or even malicious users. Overall the videos are a useful service to offer local applicators and can help build relationships with clientele and industry in need of license renewal.

*Corresponding author; email: mbhenry@ufl.edu