

RATIONALE, METHODS AND RESULTS OF A PESTICIDE CERTIFICATION EXAM PREP PROGRAM

DAVID K. PALMER

Hillsborough County Cooperative Extension Service
Seffner, FL 33584-3334

Abstract. The State of Florida has designated many classes and categories of pesticide applicators. Hillsborough County experienced a failure rate of 39% on these exams during 1997-1998. The high failure rate led to development of a series of exam prep classes, which have helped reduce the failure rate to 22% in 1999.

The State of Florida, through the Florida Statutes Chapters 482 and 487, has designated many different classifications and categories of pesticide applicators. Certification of these applicators requires a passing grade on one or more examinations. Nearly all of the certification exams are administered by the county extension offices. In some cases, the applicant's pay rate, promotional opportunities and even their job itself depends on obtaining the required certification.

Hillsborough County, for the past two years, has tested an average of 325 applicants per year. An apparent high rate of pesticide certification exam failure in Hillsborough County led to the analyzing of existing test data for 1997-1998. The failure rate for this period was determined to be above 39% or around 126 of those tested. Suspected causes of this high failure rate include overall literacy, English as a second language, lack of study skills, lack of math skills and the inappropriately high reading levels of both the manuals and the exams themselves. The high failure rate led to the development of a series of exam prep classes in an attempt to remedy the situation.

Methodology

The program consists of an annual series of exam prep classes. The most requested pesticide certifications in Hillsborough County are Private Applicator, Aquatic, Ornamental and Turf, and the Limited Commercial Maintenance Certification. A Core prep class is always held in conjunction with the above classes. Minor certification categories such as Right-of-Way are available on demand, and have been held by coordinating public agencies in Hillsborough and surrounding counties. These classes are also approved for CEU's. Early in the development of the exam prep classes, it quickly became evident that lack of math skills was a serious problem. Review of basic math and sample math problems soon took up half the allotted class time in some pesticide categories.

Each class consists of a thorough review of the material covered on the exam, practice label questions when appropriate, review of the appropriate math skills, practice math problems, and a practice test at the end of the class to point out weak areas.

The exam prep program in Hillsborough County continues in 2000, but with a focus on the certification required by commercial landscapers, the Limited Commercial Maintenance Certification. It is estimated that less than 1% of the commercial landscape maintenance contractors in the State are properly licensed.

Conclusions

The preliminary results of the pesticide exam prep program are promising. While the failure rate for 1997-1998 was 39%, the data for 1999 reveals a failure rate of only 22%, a decrease in the failure rate of 40%. While this program cannot claim total responsibility for the huge decrease in the failure rate, it did contribute.

INTERACTIVE PESTICIDE CERTIFICATION DECISION TABLE

DAVID K. PALMER

Hillsborough County Cooperative Extension Service
Seffner, FL 33584-3334

Abstract. Florida's pesticide laws are complex at best. A great deal of staff time is spent attempting to answer pesticide licensing questions. This situation led to the development of an interactive pesticide certification "decision table." While the decision table cannot answer all pesticide licensing questions, it can save agents and staff considerable time by partially automating the process.

Situation

Florida's pesticide statutes have created 21 different pesticide certifications. Multiple classifications are available within each category. To compound the complexity, the statutes are administered by two different Bureaus of the State, each requiring different qualifications, manuals, exams, and re-certification requirements, as well as different exceptions to the rules.

The Florida Statutes are at the heart of the pesticide questions most-often-asked by extension clients. These questions are also among the most difficult to answer. Typical questions