DECONTAMINATION SITES
ON A COTTON FARM

A Cotton Producer’s Approach
To Interpretation and Planning

DEFINING DECONTAMINATION

The Webster Dictionary defines decontamination as “to rid of a harmful substance, as poison.” Since 1994, the Worker Protection Standard (WPS), by federal law, has mandated the establishment of decontamination sites on cotton farms for the protection of workers and handlers engaged in agricultural production work and other specified activities. Under this regulation, decontamination supplies must be provided to workers and handlers during their employment on a cotton farm.

Decontamination with the provision of supplies to remove contaminants from skin has not been an uncommon practice on cotton farms in the past. However, prior to the creation of the WPS, there was no consistent requirement and approach on how to implement decontamination. The WPS specifies specific supplies and requirements on how supplies are to be used.

IDENTIFYING THE WORKER
AND HANDLER FOR DECONTAMINATION

THE WORKER......is anyone who: (1) is employed (including self-employed) for any type of compensation and (2) is involved in tasks such as harvesting, weeding or watering, relating to the production of agricultural plants on a cotton farm. This does not include persons who are employed by a commercial establishment to perform tasks as crop advisors.

THE HANDLER......is anyone who: (1) is employed (including self-employed) for any type of compensation by an agricultural establishment or commercial pesticide handling establishment that uses pesticides in the production of agricultural plants on a cotton farm, and (2) is doing any of the following tasks: mixing, locating, transferring or applying pesticides; handling opened containers of pesticides; acting as a flagger; cleaning, handling, adjusting or repairing the parts of mixing, loading or application equipment that may contain pesticide residues; assisting with the application of pesticides, including incorporating the pesticide into the soil after the application has occurred.
SUPPLIES NEEDED FOR A DECONTAMINATION LOCATION

Each location for decontamination must be provided with:

1. Water
   - Enough for routine washing (a minimum of 1 gallon per worker at each location) or more if insufficient and replenish the water as needed during the work period. A minimum of 3 gallons per handler is required for each location or enough water for washing the entire body if an emergency occurs.
   - Emergency eye flushing (1 pt.) (Commercially available sterile solution or as specified in the next statement). The eye flush must be immediately accessible to handlers and can be maintained in the vehicle the handler is using.
   - Quality and temperature of water which will not cause illness or injury when contacting the skin or eyes or if swallowed.
   - If water is stored in a tank, it must not be used for mixing pesticides, unless the tank is equipped with anti-back siphoning or check valves or other mechanism which correctly function to prevent pesticide exposure from the water in the tank.

2. Soap
   - Any commercially available source of soap used from a dispenser, bar, tube or other form of dispensing is appropriate. Anti-bacterial and special added cleaning agents may aid in removal of contaminants from the skin.

3. Single Use Towels
   - Towels refer to paper or paper products that are disposable. Cloth towels that could be reused and lead to further exposure to pesticide contaminants are not acceptable.

PLACEMENT OF THE DECONTAMINATION SITE

FOR HANDLERS: The most common sites are: (1) shop (2) mixing site (3) loading sites, where water and other decontamination supplies are maintained in sufficient quantities for use after mixing and applying pesticides, (4) spray equipment and (5) tractor with a spray tank, usually fitted with an additional tank located on equipment for water and supplies (including coveralls and other personal protective equipment maintained in a protective container which must not be contaminated)

Availability......during the handling task (when spraying and carrying decontamination equipment) or not more than one-quarter mile from the handling task.

FOR WORKERS: The most common sites are:
   (1) truck (2) tractor (cultivation); a water tank or other water storage device with PPE supplies contained in a pesticide resistant container must be located near the worksite (must be within one-quarter mile of workers).

Availability......not more than one-quarter mile from where the working task (cultivation, hoeing, irrigation equipment maintenance) is being done or the nearest access point if the distance is greater than one-quarter mile.

TIP: If the time of 30 days (required to provide decontamination supplies) after the REI or the application has expired and there are no treated fields within one-quarter mile of work activities, then NO decontamination supplies are required. Decontamination supplies are required only when workers are present during the 30-day or 7-day (chemical with REI of 4 hours or less) period following the REI or application has expired.