

# STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE (SOP) FOR PEST CONTROL OPERATORS (PCOS) IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN FORESTRY INDUSTRY

## ABSTRACT

This Guidance Document aims to assist all stakeholders in the South African Forestry Industry - whether large-scale commercial operations, smallholder farmers or landowners - in understanding the compliance requirements and best practices for Pest Control Operators (PCOs). It outlines the process for obtaining PCO registration and compliance with relevant legislation, including the handling of pesticides, safety protocols and environmental considerations.

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# Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Pest Control Operators (PCOs) in the South African Forestry Industry

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## 1. Purpose

This Guidance Document aims to assist all stakeholders in the South African Forestry Industry—whether large-scale commercial operations, smallholder farmers or landowners—in understanding the compliance requirements and best practices for Pest Control Operators (PCOs). It outlines the process for obtaining PCO registration and compliance with relevant legislation, including the handling of pesticides, safety protocols and environmental considerations.

PCO: “means a person who as, or in the course of, his trade or occupation administers agricultural remedies for the purposes for which they are intended” (Definition of 'pest control operator' inserted by s. 1 (b) of [Fertiliser, Farm Feeds, Agricultural Remedies and Stock Remedies Amendment Act, Act 4 of 1980](#))

## 2. Applicable Legislation

- **[Fertilizers, Farm Feeds, Agricultural Remedies, and Stock Remedies Act, 1947 \(Act No. 36 of 1947\)](#)**: Governs the registration, sale and use of agricultural remedies (including pesticides) in South Africa. It also governs the registration of pest control operators (PCOs) who work with them. **[Please note: The 1980 Amendment to Act 36 \(Act 4 of 1980\)](#)**.
- **[Pest Control Operator \(PCO\) Regulations 2011](#)**: Requires a person that is hired to do pest control for monetary consideration, to be registered as a PCO but excludes an employee who performs pest control for his employer on the employer's property (i.e. not for hire) However, any employee who handles restricted-use agricultural remedies\* without the direct supervision of a registered PCO must be registered as a PCO.
- **[Regulations Relating to Agricultural Remedies of 25 August 2023](#)**: These regulations, issued under the **Fertilizers, Farm Feeds, Agricultural Remedies, and Stock Remedies Act (Act No. 36 of 1947)**, outline updated requirements for the registration, use and handling of agricultural remedies, including pesticides. Key provisions include stricter labeling requirements, improved safety protocol, and enhanced environmental protection measures. The regulations reinforce compliance obligations for Pest Control Operators (PCOs), ensuring responsible pesticide application in line with industry best practices. *According to this regulation a “restricted agricultural remedy\*” is defined as an agricultural remedy which the Registrar, out of concern for its human health or environmental risk, has set out additional information to be shown on the label concerning essential conditions in respect of the display, distribution or limitations on use of, or qualifications of persons who*

*may use the agricultural remedy, and such remedy shall comply with the criteria as set out in Annexure A of the regulations.*

- **Hazardous Substances Act (Act No. 15 of 1973):** Regulates the sale and storage of hazardous substances, including pesticides. Pest Control Operators must purchase products covered under this Act from dealers with a valid Section 4 Licence to trade with Group 1 (Category B) hazardous substances.
- **Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHS Act, Act No. 85 of 1993):** Ensures the safety and health of workers involved in pesticide handling, application and other pest control activities.
- **National Environmental Management: Waste Act, 2008 (Act No. 59 of 2008):** This Act regulates the safe disposal of empty pesticide containers and hazardous waste (i.e. obsolete pesticides, contaminated packaging and material, etc). Re-using, selling or donating empty pesticide containers for any other purpose is unlawful. Further, burning or burying such containers is considered a criminal offence under the Act.
- **SANS Standards** (e.g. SANS 10206 for safe handling, storage and disposal of pesticides, SANS 10228 for classification of dangerous goods, SANS 10118 for the aerial application of pesticides and relevant guidelines).

### 3. Obtaining Pest Control Operator (PCO) Registration

To register as a Pest Control Operator (PCO) in South Africa, you need to complete an application form, provide a medical certificate, attach relevant qualifications in pest control, demonstrate practical experience, and submit the application to the Registrar of Act 36 of 1947 at the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), accompanied by the required fees.

- **Step-by-Step Process:**
  - Ensure that all qualifications are in order and are applicable.
  - Understand and adhere to the registration categories (e.g. Category 1 for general pest control, Category 2 for restricted use).
  - Register with the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), or the relevant authority.
  - Forms to complete on DALRRD website:  
<https://www.dalrrd.gov.za/index.php/publication/580-application-forms>
  - Or from CropLife SA:  
<https://www.croplife.co.za/CropProtection/RestrictedUseProducts>
  - Pay the applicable registration fees.
  - Valid for 3 years

- **PCO's Responsibilities:**

- Be in possession of a valid PCO registration certificate with P-number.
- Registrations for PCOs must be renewed every third year.
- Supervise trainee (intern) PCOs, if required, during application.
- Ensure compliance with all relevant legislation, including safe pesticide application, handling and disposal.
- Ensure that all staff handling pesticides are properly trained and certified.
- Maintain accurate records of pesticide use, worker safety protocols and environmental risk assessments.
- Conduct regular risk assessments to identify hazards and ensure safety.

## 4. PCO Responsibilities Regarding Restricted Use Agricultural Remedies

- **Restricted Use Agricultural Remedies** must only be applied by registered PCOs with specific training and certification.
- **PCOs must ensure the following:**
  - Adhere to strict handling, storage, application and disposal protocols without deviation from the label.
  - Ensure the correct use of restricted pesticides only in situations where other methods are ineffective.
  - Provide valid documentation and accurate records for all applications.
  - Follow any additional regulatory requirements outlined for restricted use agricultural remedies.

## 5. Occupational Health and Safety (OHS Act) Requirements

- **Worker Safety and Health:**
  - **General Duty of Care:** Employers must ensure that workers are protected from pesticides by providing a safe working environment, including ensuring adequate training and supervision.
  - **Training and Supervision:** PCOs must ensure that all workers handling pesticides receive appropriate training on responsible pesticide use, PPE, disposal and emergency procedures.
  - **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** The OHS Act mandates the provision of suitable PPE when handling pesticides. This includes gloves, goggles, respirators,

and chemical-resistant clothing, depending on the pesticide being used and the specific label requirements.

- **Exposure Monitoring:** Employers must monitor pesticide exposure levels and ensure that workers are not exposed to harmful levels of pesticides.
- **Risk Assessment:**
  - PCOs are required to perform a thorough **risk assessment** to identify potential hazards associated with pesticide use.
  - Based on the assessment, **mitigation measures** (e.g. buffer zones, correct PPE, safe handling procedures) should be implemented to reduce the risk of accidents or exposure.
- **Emergency Procedures:**
  - PCOs and forestry operators must have **emergency response plans** in place in case of pesticide exposure or accidents, including **first aid measures** and emergency contact numbers (i.e. Poison Information Centre).
  - **Incident Reporting:** Any incidents involving pesticide exposure or accidents must be reported to the relevant authorities as per OHS Act regulations.

## 6. Pre-Treatment Planning

- **Risk Assessment:** Assess the environment for proximity to water bodies, sensitive ecosystems and non-target species in relation to the application area.
- **Notification:** Notify stakeholders, including workers, surrounding communities and any relevant authorities in the area, before treatment.
- **Environmental Impact:** Plan for minimising environmental damage, including adherence to buffer zone requirements and avoiding contamination of water sources.

## 7. Pesticide Application and Disposal

- **Worker Safety:**
  - Ensure all workers involved in pesticide applications are adequately trained in responsible use and properly equipped with the necessary PPE.
  - Adhere to label instructed **re-entry intervals** to avoid health risks associated with pesticide exposure.
- **Environmental Protection:**
  - Use the least toxic and most effective pesticide as far as possible.
  - Follow all label instructions in terms of application to prevent pesticide drift, runoff and contamination of water resources, wetlands and riparian zones.

## Timber Industry Pesticide Working Group (TIPWG) Guidance Document

- Ensure that **buffer zones** are maintained to protect non-target species and ecosystems.
- **Disposal**
  - **CropLife SA Pesticide Container Management Programme:**
    - CropLife SA operates a **Product Recovery Organisation (PRO)** that provides an industry-supported solution for the safe disposal of pesticide containers and hazardous waste.
    - Through the PRO, registered stakeholders can return properly cleaned and triple-rinsed pesticide containers to designated collection points, ensuring compliance with legal and environmental standards.
    - CropLife SA also facilitates the responsible recycling or destruction of pesticide containers in alignment with South African legislation.
  - **TIPWG SOP for Pesticide Waste Management:**
    - The **TIPWG SOP** provides detailed best practices for handling, storing and disposing of pesticide waste in forestry operations.
    - They emphasise the **triple-rinse method** for cleaning pesticide containers before disposal, reducing environmental contamination risks.
    - TIPWG promotes the use of **certified disposal service providers** to collect and process hazardous waste, ensuring compliance with both the National Environmental Management: Waste Act and industry standards.
    - Companies and landowners are encouraged to keep **detailed disposal records** to demonstrate compliance during audits and environmental assessments.

By following the **National Environmental Management: Waste Act, CropLife SA PRO framework, and TIPWG SOP**, forestry companies can ensure safe, legal and environmentally responsible pesticide waste disposal.

## 8. Record Keeping and Compliance Monitoring

- Maintain detailed records of pesticide purchases, risk assessments, applications, safety protocols and training.
- Monitor compliance with all legal and environmental standards through regular audits and inspections.
- Ensure ongoing communication with stakeholders to address any concerns and gather feedback on pesticide applications.

## 9. Emergency Protocols for Pesticide Spills or Poisoning

- **Immediate Actions:** In the event of a pesticide spill or worker exposure, follow the established emergency response procedures, which should include a spill clean-up protocol and reporting procedures.
- Importantly, note that in the event of pesticide exposure or poisoning, refer to the Safety Data Sheet (SDS – Section 4) of the pesticide product for specific instructions or alternatively contact the Poison Information Centre (PIC) number on the product label for specialist advice.
- **Reporting:** All pesticide-related incidents must be reported to the relevant authorities in accordance with OHS Act and applicable regulations.

## 10. Conclusion

This Guideline provides an overview of the legal and procedural requirements for PCOs operating within the South African Forestry Industry. Adhering to these guidelines will ensure safe and effective pesticide use, while also ensuring compliance with all relevant legislation as highlighted throughout this document. By adhering to regulations, PCOs, employers and workers can minimise health risks, protect the environment and contribute to sustainable forestry management.

## 11. Additional Information

- **Temporary Documentation:** If the PCO certificate has not yet been issued, a copy of the application and payment receipt may be retained in place of the certificate until it is formally received. The application should take 2 to 3 weeks but may take up to 4 months if the information is incomplete.

## 12. Summary Table: When a PCO is Required

| Scenario                           | PCO Registration Required?                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Restricted-Use Pesticides          | <b>Yes</b><br><br>To reiterate: A spray operator employed by a forester may only apply such products if he/she is registered as a PCO or where such products are applied under the direct supervision of a PCO. |
| General Use Pesticides on Own Land | <b>No*</b><br><br>For aerial applications – Refer to the TIPWG SOP.                                                                                                                                             |
| Contractor Applying Pesticides     | <b>Yes</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

\*Note: Always refer to the pesticide label and specific regulations for guidance.

