



Preliminary Report

Pesticide safety programs to protect farmworkers

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January 2024



Legislative Auditor's Conclusion

Three agencies work to protect farmworkers from pesticide exposure. Setting common goals and sharing information will likely help them reduce harmful exposures.

Study answers three questions

Agencies involved

Health

Agriculture

Labor & Industries

1 Do programs comply with state law and best practices?

In many areas, yes
But gaps exist

2 Do agencies use languages spoken by farmworkers?

For most activities, yes

3 How do the agencies coordinate when they share responsibility?

Opportunities exist to improve coordination

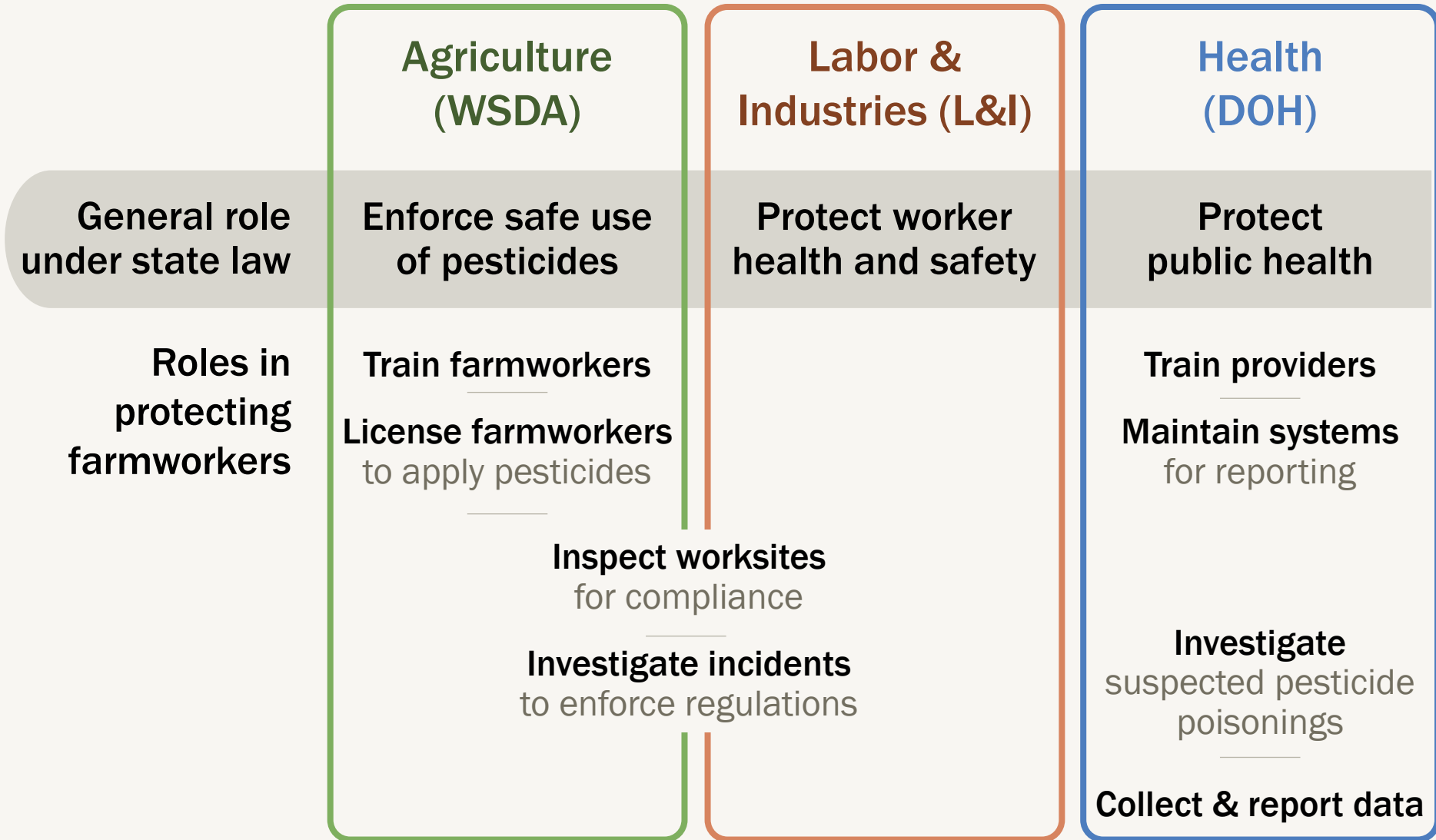
Presentation Overview

- Three agencies
- Licensing and training
- Inspections and investigations
- Pesticide poisoning surveillance
- Interagency collaboration

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Three agencies share responsibility



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WSDA licenses thousands of farmworkers each year

Licenses require an exam

Exams offered in English and Spanish

Private applicator

of licenses

9,736

Ag. weed control

1,259

Laws and safety

Required for most other licenses. Not counted separately.

Exams offered in English

Ag. insects & diseases

893

Soil fumigation

302

Aquatic pest control

215

Rancher private applicator

87

Limited private applicator

84



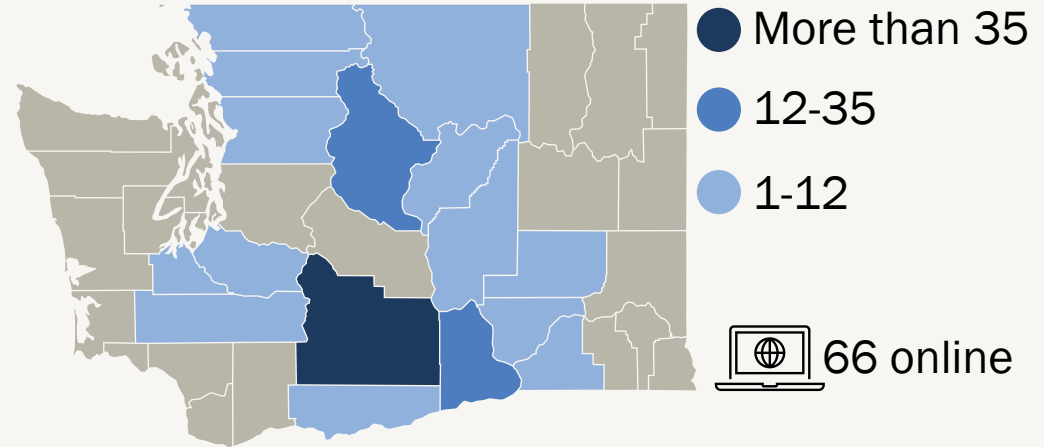
WSDA offers a variety of training

Pesticide handlers and
people seeking licenses

Hands-on training, best
practices, regulatory
updates

EPA-approved

305 trainings since 2017



3,300

average annual participants

90%

attended Spanish-only
or bilingual sessions

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Agencies use formal agreement to coordinate investigations

Response to complaint, referral, or pesticide incident

**Agriculture
(WSDA)**

No employer-
employee
relationship

*Pesticides drift from
one farm to another*

**Labor & Industries
(L&I)**

Employer-
employee
relationship

*Farmworkers enter
area before it is safe*

**Health
(DOH)**

Pesticide
related
illnesses

*People become ill after
pesticide exposure*

No formal agreement to share inspection information

Inspection: unannounced visit to check compliance with regulations

Different processes, separate inspections

L&I uses a risk-based algorithm

WSDA chooses sites based on field observation and other factors

Opportunities to improve

Better information sharing could help inform agency decisions about where to conduct routine inspections

Legislative Auditor's Recommendation

WSDA and L&I should create a formal agreement to share inspection information that will support inspection scheduling, avoid duplication, and maximize resources.

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DOH collects data about pesticide exposure and illness

Understand pesticide poisoning

Identify outbreaks and emerging pesticide problems

Support interventions and prevention efforts



Many entities report suspected farmworker pesticide poisonings to DOH

Source of first report	Cases	Percent
Washington poison center	139	49%
L&I workers' compensation claims	63	22%
DOH investigation	43	17%
Health care providers	12	4%
WSDA	9	3%
Employers	9	3%
Other	3	1%
Total	284	

Cases of work-related pesticide poisonings of farmworkers (2019-2022)



Electronic case reporting helps providers report potential poisonings


Benefits include speed, completeness, accuracy

DOH has not yet added pesticide poisoning to its electronic case reporting system

Doing so could improve reporting, problem identification, and prevention efforts

Legislative Auditor's Recommendation

DOH should begin the process of incorporating pesticide illness into its electronic case reporting system.



State law directs DOH to develop a medical education program

Symptoms

Treatment

Diagnosis

Reporting

DOH has not established the program

Legislative Auditor's Recommendation

DOH should establish the medical education program required by state law.

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Legislature has supported interagency collaboration for pesticide safety

1989 - 2010

Pesticide Incident Reporting and Tracking Panel (PIRT)



2019 - 2025

Pesticide Application Safety Committee



2018

Pesticide Application Safety Workgroup



Recommended

WSDA, L&I, and DOH can apply best practices to improve work and reduce pesticide exposures

Agencies' current practice

Individual outcomes

Individually track progress

Insufficient information sharing

Best practice

Common outcomes

Track progress together

Share data

Legislative Auditor's Recommendation

WSDA, L&I, and DOH should:

- Define common outcomes for farmworker pesticide safety.
- Develop plans to monitor, assess, and communicate their achievement of those outcomes.
- Leverage resources and information to improve prevention efforts and administer programs.

Next Steps

Proposed Final Report

April 2024

Full report:

[Leg.wa.gov/jlarc](https://leg.wa.gov/jlarc)



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