

# Fostering safer practices for manure applicators



**Application firms have seen savings of \$500 to \$8,000 per year on liability insurance as a result of the certification program.**

## Situation

For-hire manure applicators handle approximately 30 percent of the manure generated in the state of Wisconsin. This makes manure application firms major partners in meeting regulatory requirements. When properly handled, manure recycles valuable nutrients to soil for crop production; however, spills can contaminate natural areas, waterways and drinking water.

The Professional Nutrient Applicators Association of Wisconsin (PNAAW) was formed eight years ago through a collaborative effort between custom manure applicators and members of the University of Wisconsin-Extension's Nutrient Management team. PNAAW turned to its UW-Extension advisors for a self-initiated voluntary certification program to improve professionalism among its members.

## Response

In 2003, the Nutrient Management Team Custom Applicator Subcommittee worked with PNAAW, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer protection staff to develop a best practices training and certification program.

The program progresses through three certification levels. Firms must meet Level 1 requirements to gain Level 2, and meet Level 2 requirements to achieve Level 3.

- Level 1 provides information on spill response, common sense application and handling, road safety issues, confined space safety, and Wisconsin nutrient management planning and regulation. An exam is given at the end of the training to help evaluate learning, reinforce educational messages and improve subsequent training and teaching performance.
- Level 2 requires crew supervisors and business owners to complete six to eight hours of continuing education every two years. The Level 2 program covers topics such as manure application and handling, safety, sensitive area identification, financial planning, business management, environmental issues, and employee relations.



- Level 3 requires business owners to develop and implement an Environmental Management System (EMS) plan for their business. The EMS requires documentation of environmental performance and implementation. An independent audit is conducted every 12 to 18 months.

The PNAAW annual meeting and symposium is used as a vehicle to deliver professional development and training for custom manure applicators. It is at this two-day conference where the Level 1 statewide training and a bulk of the Level 2 training sessions are held.

A spill response video has been produced through collaboration with UW-Extension, Michigan State University, University of Illinois and PNAAW. The *Prevention is the Best Solution* video is used to help custom manure business managers train their employees on how to respond to manure spills. The video can be viewed in either English or Spanish at <http://www.animalagteam.msu.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=3048>

## Outcomes

Highlights of the training certification program include:

- Level 1 training has been provided each year for the past six years in numerous locations around the state. As a result, 149 professional applicators representing 36 firms and 32 farmers successfully completed Level 1 certification in 2008.
- Sixty-two custom manure application business managers have completed Level 2 certification by obtaining six hours of continuing education over a two-year period.
- Twenty-two firms have successfully completed Level 3 training by assembling an EMS document for their business.
- Application firms have seen savings of \$500-\$8,000 per year on liability insurance as a result of the certification program.

- Manure applicators in several states (Ohio, Iowa, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Texas and Alberta, CA) have or are creating associations based on our model and implementing aspects of the training program.

### Contact

For more information:

Kevin Erb

Conservation Professional  
Development and Training  
Coordinator

University of Wisconsin-Extension  
920-391-4652

[kevin.erb@ces.uwex.edu](mailto:kevin.erb@ces.uwex.edu)



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