

EPA Revisions to the Worker Protection Standard (WPS), WHAT'S NEXT?

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On a daily basis the 2.5 million farmworkers living in the US are exposed to pesticides. Due to the persistent exposure to pesticides, it is not surprising that thousands experience acute pesticide illness or injury each year, and countless others suffer chronic health problems as a result of these toxic exposures.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), due to the dangerous health effects of pesticide exposure occurring among farmworkers, requires by law that all agriculture workers are trained in the Worker Protection Standard (WPS).

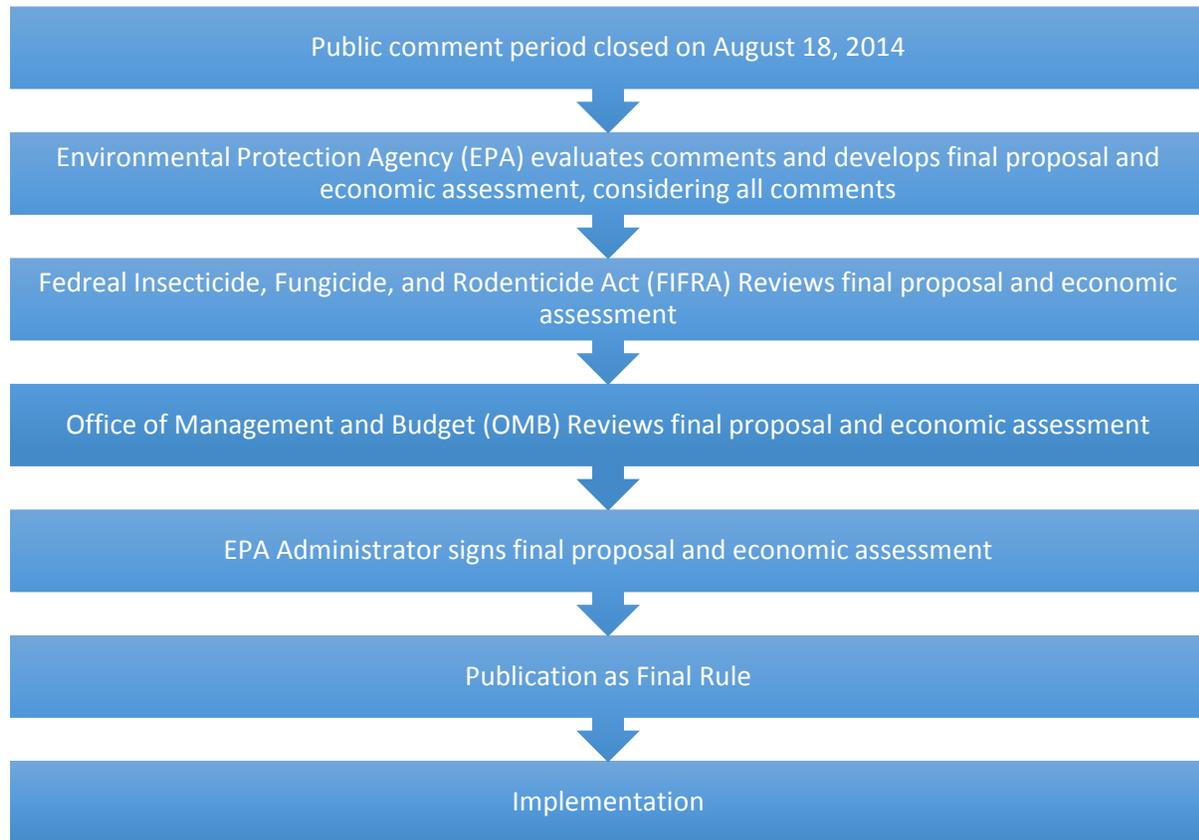
After 20 years, EPA has finally reviewed their pesticide safety regulations in order to improve protections, trainings and information available to agricultural workers. On March 2014, EPA published the suggested new regulations and opened it for public comments. On June 2014 the public comment period was extended. As of August 18, 2014 the public commenting period was closed. Over 2,000 comments were submitted from different sectors, such as: non-profit organizations, congress, farmworkers, growers, and corporations.

AFOP has expressed support to EPA's revisions. We submitted our comments online on August 13' 2014. Following is a quick overview of our comments:

1. AFOP agrees WPS training should be provided on an annual basis
 - As of today, by law it's required to receive the WPS training every 5 years
2. AFOP agrees that take-home exposure should be included in the WPS
 - As of today, the WPS does not include any take-home pesticide exposure information
3. AFOP agrees to reduce the "grace period" to two days
 - As of today, farmworkers are required to be trained on the WPS within the first 5 days of their initial working start date)
4. AFOP believes that 16 is still too young to handle dangerous pesticides, the minimum age should be at least 18.
 - As of today, there is no regulated age limit)
5. AFOP believes that central posting information is a must and should not be eliminated as proposed

AFOP's Executive Director, Daniel Sheehan, in collaboration with AFOP's Health & Safety staff worked closely with EPA to help get these provisions passed as quick as possible. There is a long road ahead of us, and although not all regulations are as perfect as we would like them to be, EPA has taken an important step to improve these regulations in order to protect the health and safety of all farmworkers.

The process these revisions are going through can be seen in the following flow chart.



AFOP' Health & Safety is excited for the regulations to be finalized, and is ready to start implementing the new rules. Reina Lemus, a farmworker who published her comments on the WPS revisions said that "They [farmworkers] are alone; it's time to take action". I say "You are not alone, we are taking action. We are moving forward to improve the quality of trainings to improve farmworkers health and safety."