

Four million pounds. Two thousand tons. Sixty-four million ounces.

No matter how you say it, it's a big number, and for the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer services, it's a major milestone. Four million pounds is the amount of pesticides the department has helped collect and properly dispose of since 1980. That's the year the Pesticide Disposal Assistance Program began helping farmers and homeowners get rid of banned, outdated or unwanted pesticides/herbicides.

The end result is that PDAP protects human health and the environment by reducing the potential contamination of soil, water, and air from leaking containers, spills, and illegal dumping or burning.

"We're trying to be proactive and prevent a problem," said PDAP manager Derrick Bell. "People want to do the right thing, and we want to help people do the right thing. We give them a viable option to help them."

Some pesticides that were commonly used years ago, are no longer recommended for use today. Bell said PDAP has even collected pesticides from as far back at the 1940's. Even Agent Orange from the Vietnam War era is on the list of chemicals PDAP has collected.

During the last four decades, the collection and disposal has proven to be a valuable way to protect people and the environment in North Carolina. The program averages a collection of about 160,000 pounds of pesticides a year, and recent years have been increasing that average. The last seven-year period has seen the biggest volume of any period in the program's history, and last year was a record setting year. PDAP collected and disposed of 208,000 pounds of pesticides in 2019. The four-million-pounds milestone was actually reached in early fall of 2019, and more collections since then have pushed the overall total even higher.

Bell said he believes the program is one of the best in the state because of its proactive approach.

"It saves the state money by preventing problems because it costs a lot more to clean up after the fact," Bell said. "Doing clean up - it gets really expensive really quickly to remove something from the environment that doesn't belong."

Funding for PDAP comes from taxpayer money designated by the General Assembly each year, plus the Pesticide Environmental Trust Fund (PETF). Money from every pesticide/herbicide sale in North Carolina goes into the fund. ((For the first time ever, a federal grant may also be available to help with funding this year.))

Each county in the state generally has a PDAP collection day every other year. By alternating counties though, farmers and homeowners can count on a PDAP collection in their county or an adjacent county about every six to eight months.

PDAP contracts with a hazardous materials collection company for the collections and safe disposal. Local extension offices usually help set up collection sites and dates. Occasionally, PDAP can provide on-site assistance if there is a significant amount of banned, outdated or unwanted pesticides on a farm or other location.

In addition to setting up locations and dates and coordinating with a company for collection and disposal, Bell said he also helps with other logistics. If a pesticide can be used for its intended purpose,

that's actually the best way to get rid of it. So if someone has leftover or unwanted pesticides that someone else could use, Bell and his coworkers arrange a transfer of those chemicals instead of a hazmat disposal.

While the program is aimed at helping farmers and homeowners, landscapers and some other businesses such as golf courses can get assistance from the program too. Pesticide dealers are not eligible for assistance. Also, fertilizer is not something PDAP helps collect and dispose of.

PDAP is operated through the Structural Pest Control and Pesticides Division. As part of the program, Bell and his coworkers also help coordinate some household hazardous waste collections. For more details and updates on scheduled collections, visit <http://www.ncagr.gov/SPCAP/pesticides/PDAP/>