

Innovative pesticide recertification webinar series — success amid COVID-19

AT A GLANCE

During the COVID-19 shutdown of 2020, University of Idaho Extension developed an online webinar series to address pesticide applicator needs.

The Situation

When the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) began in 2020, face-to-face Extension programs were eventually curtailed. However, Idaho pesticide applicators needed education to maintain their individual state pesticide licenses.

The University of Idaho Extension Pesticide Safety Education Program (PSEP) was tasked with developing a COVID-19 compliant method for delivering pesticide safety education recertification programs to fulfill the required continuing education credits for pesticide licensing. Pesticide applicators in Idaho are dependent on the UI Extension program to deliver workshops, classes and seminars throughout the state that qualify for pesticide recertification credits. The Idaho Pesticide and Chemigation law and rules, administered by the Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) states that to maintain an active pesticide license, private applicators must successfully complete six recertification credits and professional applicators must successfully complete 15 recertification credits during a two-year recertification period. ISDA requires that each webinar must be 60 minutes in length for recertification credit approval. Prior to 2020, ISDA pesticide rules allowed only 50% of recertification credits to be

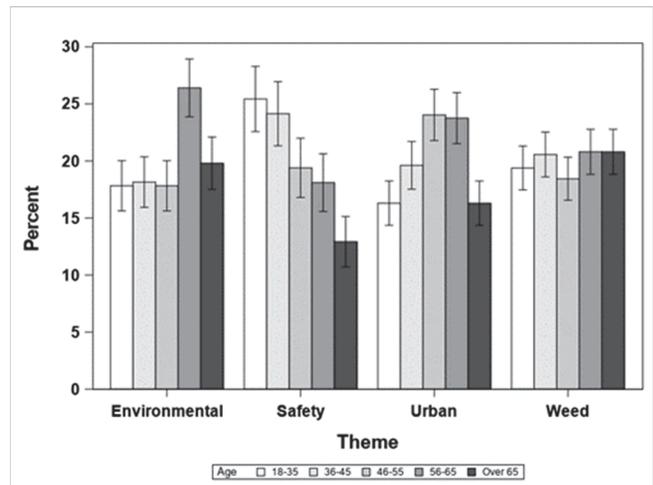


Figure 1. Bar graph demonstrates the association between applicator age and webinar theme they participated in.

obtained from an online source; the remainder had to be obtained from in-person live classes, workshops and seminars.

In the fall of 2020, ISDA revised the Idaho pesticide rules, allowing 100% of the required recertification credits to be earned through an online delivery platform. In addition to developing the online webinars, UI Extension PSEP was tasked with developing a protocol for registering participants, collecting pesticide applicator license numbers and verifying that each participant fulfilled the 60-minute time requirement mandated by Idaho state law. The UI Extension PSEP webinar series was launched to design and test the acceptance and effectiveness of an online pesticide safety education program for recertification credits.

Our Response

A team of UI Extension faculty, from the statewide PSEP and counties, met via Zoom to discuss program formatting, scheduling and pertinent topics for 2020. The team collectively developed and marketed a 2020 UI Extension Pesticide Recertification Webinar Series for Idaho pesticide license applicators. The series consisted of 12 one-hour webinars, based on four themes, that provided 12 pesticide recertification credits (CEUS). The four themes were: 1. Safety First, 2. Urban Integrated Pest Management, 3. Weed Management and 4. Environmental Impacts of Pesticides. One webinar per week was delivered, October through November. Two webinars per week were delivered in December to complete the series before the end of year Holiday closures and the Dec. 31 recertification deadline for the professional applicators. The series was offered through Zoom video conferencing which provided opportunities to utilize speakers from other organizations and states which enhanced programming offerings. Educational presentations were given by UI Extension and Washington State University Extension educators, ISDA and Idaho Department of Health and Welfare staff.

We developed a protocol, with ISDA guidance, to ensure participants were present and engaged during the 60-minute required timeframe for the recertification webinar.

A voluntary post-webinar survey was developed and approved by the University of Idaho Institutional Research Board (IRB). The survey was designed to measure the impact and effectiveness of utilizing this online platform for delivering educational programming.

Program Outcomes

The webinar series resulted in 2,600 pesticide recertification CEU credits issued to Idaho pesticide applicators. The voluntary survey was completed by 1,356 pesticide applicators. The largest group that participated in the webinars were professional agricultural applicators, followed by private applicators, then professional urban applicators. Southwestern Idaho had the greatest number of participants with 41% followed by participants from the Magic Valley, southeastern Idaho, northern Idaho and eastern Idaho. This was to be expected since southwestern Idaho is the most populated area of the state. Participants that were in the last year of the recertification period (year two) were 58% of the total surveyed. The remainder (42%) were in the first year of the recertification period, indicating that these applicators attended the online webinars even though they did not have an urgent need to complete their recertification credits.

Most participants (97%) believed that the pesticide recertification webinars were worth their time. An average of 98% indicated that they would plan to attend future pesticide recertification online webinars offered by University of Idaho Extension. Survey data indicates that there was a significant association between the age of the applicator and the webinar theme they attended. Those in the older age groups were more interested in the “Environmental Impacts of Pesticides” whereas the younger applicators were more interested in the “Safety First” webinars (Figure 1). We found that 90% of the surveyed participants thought the online format was convenient. An average of 82% indicated that the online webinar platform saved their company and them time and money. As expected, most applicators viewed the webinars from their office or their homes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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