

Drive-In Pesticide Exam COVID-19 Protocols

The Public Health Agricultural Resource Management (PHARM) division of Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, & Markets (VAAFAM) routinely proctors pesticide applicator exams throughout the State every year. Exam sessions are scheduled every Wednesday in Montpelier; the first Monday of every month in Rutland; the second Wednesday of every month in Derby; and the first Thursday of every month in Brattleboro, and Saint Johnsbury and alternating first Thursdays in Saint Albans and Williston. A decreased prioritized exam schedule will be implemented in the foreseeable future.

All exam sessions have ceased since Governor Scott implemented Addendum 6 to Executive Order 01-20 directing all Vermonters, except critical services, to stay at home unless essential reasons require leaving home.

The Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) has identified many essential services that may continue to operate outside of the home, provided those entities develop strategies, procedures, and practices designed to comply with the strict guidance for social distancing provided by Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Vermont Department of Health (VDH). Some of the essential services include individuals or businesses that must use pesticides to protect crops, human health, or to maintain a pesticide applicator certificate in order to comply with regulations that correspond to agricultural pesticide use.

As of March 25, 2020, the PHARM division has received dozens of phone calls and emails requesting information about when the pesticide applicator exams will be made available to examinees. Since Executive Order 01-20 has been extended to a predicted end date of May 15, 2020, many of the PHARM staff have vocalized their concern about the impacts the restrictions will have on essential individuals and businesses that are not able to procure their pesticide applicator certificates, and therefore not be able to comply with state and federal regulations related to pesticide applications, protect their crops, provide essential services to other essential service providers or even provide protection to customers from disease vectoring pests.

For this reason, PHARM staff have devised a plan to proctor exams for essential services in accordance with Executive Order 01-20.

COVID-19 Pesticide Applicator Exam (COVID PAE) Plan:

PHARM Field Agents will identify at least two centralized locations within their territories in which to provide applicator exam opportunities. Examinee numbers will be limited to six total including the proctor.

- These sites would ideally be large parking lots or areas whereby examinees can park their vehicle (1 person per vehicle) far enough away from the next vehicle to provide safe distancing. Other examples of exam locations include, but not limited to:
 - ❖ School parking lots – Local school districts must provide permission, and scheduling with the district is essential in order to ensure safety compliance with the executive order.

- ❖ BGS facilities – Regional state building parking lots where space is available. Scheduling with BGS will ensure safety and compliance.
 - ❖ State parks – After permission from Forest, Parks, and Recreation has been secured, this option allows for outdoor exam sessions which provides much more space for social distancing; convenience to test-takers in that they will not be cramped in a car; ease of monitoring by PHARM staff; and a more private and secure setting for both PHARM personnel and examinees.
- Examinees will need to pre-register so that the exams can be safely processed prior to the exam session.
 - In preparation for the exam session, all exams for those registered will be placed in large zip-lock bags along with the name of the examinee.
 - Exams will be prepared by a PHARM staff member donning required PPE, such as cotton mask and disposable nitrile/latex gloves.
 - Exams will be prepared and placed into transport containers designated for each regional location no less than one week in advance of the exam date.
 - All examinees will be required to bring their own pencil, writing surface (such as a clipboard or thick text book not related to the exam materials), and approved calculator, - cell phone calculators will not be permitted.
 - All examinees will also be required to have and use masks for any portion of the process that is outside of the examinee’s vehicle. PHARM staff have the right to refuse examination to any examinee that does not adhere to this rule.
 - The exam proctor has the right to refuse or terminate exam administration should any of the protocols mentioned above not be followed by the test taker.
 - Examinees may choose to pre-pay by check, or after exam completion. If they do not pass the exam, checks will be returned to examinees.

Once at the exam location, examinees will park according to PHARM staff direction. All PHARM staff personnel will adhere to the CDC/VDH COVID-19 guidance of no less than 6-foot social distancing, wearing cloth masks, and using disposable nitrile/latex gloves.

- ❖ Gloves will be changed after each new task and in between collecting examinee exam packets.
- Empty zip-lock bags will be placed on the hood of each vehicle, and after PHARM staff have retreated, examinees will place their cell phone and identification in the bag.

- Once the examinee is back in their vehicle, PHARM staff will observe identification and upon approval, place the exam packet on the hood of the vehicle.
- After the PHARM staff has retreated, the examinee will retrieve their exam packet while the cell phone bag remains on the hood (inclement weather may dictate that vehicle trunks be used instead of vehicle dashboard in order to protect personal property).
- When exams have been completed, examinee will place exams back into the zip-lock bag and place on vehicle hood, retrieve their cell phone bag and return to their vehicle.
- The PHARM staff member will then collect the completed exam packet, and with newly gloved hands, and place the packet in a new zip-lock bag and then into the transport container.
- Exam packets will not be opened for grading purposes for at least one week and will be left in the transport container, or inside vehicle untouched for that entire period. All surfaces, including transport container will be disinfected.
- Once graded, examinees will be notified via telephone or email, and applicator forms or links to forms will be provided.
- Instructions for exam testing during this period will be posted on our webpage.
- If an exam taker does not pass the exam, they will not be prioritized for a re-take, and may have to wait several weeks/months to retake.

This plan would allow individual regional PHARM staff and field agents to proctor exams regularly but minimize examinee numbers at any one location, which would in turn, reduce the number of potential interactions while allowing: essential services to continue their food production and crop protection; provide protective services to other essential service providers; comply with state and federal regulations; and provide general health related insect-disease vector protection.