

New Directives for Flea and Tick Products

The EPA will require clearer instructions on the use of spot-on products for cats and dogs.

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To minimize adverse reactions resulting from incorrect use of spot-on flea and tick treatments, the Environmental Protection Agency is requiring clearer warnings on labels.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has outlined a plan of action to increase restrictions on spot-on flea and tick products for cats and dogs, starting with a call for specific language on appropriate dosage according to a pet's weight as well as clear warnings on labels.

New restrictions will start to appear on these products in the next several months, and pet owners must carefully read and follow labels before exposing pets to these pesticides, said Steve Owens, assistant administrator of EPA's Office of Prevention, Pesticides and Toxic Substances. A significant increase in reported adverse incidents prompted the EPA to conduct a yearlong evaluation, resulting in a set of voluntary requirements for existing and new products to address inadequate labels.

"These are poisons designed to kill fleas and ticks, and they do their job," Owens said during a press teleconference to announce the steps that EPA will pursue. First, manufacturers of spot-on pesticide products are urged to improve labeling, making instructions clearer to prevent product misuse.

In addition, more precise label instructions are required to ensure proper dosage per pet weight. Dog and cat products should also be differentiated with clear markings, and similar brand names for dog and cat products should be avoided. Similar names may have led to misuse, the EPA said.

Based on product-specific evaluations, the EPA may also require additional changes so that consumers are not "left to guess for themselves," Owens said.

When new products are registered, the EPA is now granting only conditional, time-limited registrations to allow for post-marketing product surveillance. If there are incidents of concern associated with the product, EPA will take appropriate regulatory action.

Finally, EPA plans to restrict the use of certain inert ingredients that the agency finds may contribute to the incidents. A consumer information campaign will explain new label directions and help users avoid making medication errors.