

The Effects of Adjuvants on Herbicide Efficacy

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Abstract

Spray adjuvants generally consist of surfactants, oils and fertilizers. The main function of a NIS is to increase spray retention, but at a lesser degree, may function in herbicide absorption. Surfactants vary widely in chemical composition and in their effect on spray retention, deposition, and herbicide absorption. Oil additives increase herbicide absorption and spray retention. Oil adjuvants are petroleum (PO) or methylated vegetable or seed oils (MSO) plus an emulsifier for dispersion in water. The emulsifier, the oil class (petroleum, vegetable, etc.), and the specific type of oil in a class all influence effectiveness of an oil adjuvant. Oil adjuvants enhance POST herbicides more than NIS and are effective with all POST herbicides, except Liberty and Cobra, and will antagonize Roundup. MSO adjuvants greatly enhance POST herbicides much more than NIS and PO adjuvants. MSO adjuvants are more aggressive in dissolving leaf wax and cuticle resulting in faster and greater herbicide absorption. The greater herbicide enhancement from MSO adjuvants may occur more in low humidity/low rainfall environments where weeds develop a thicker cuticle. MSO adjuvants cost 2 to 3 times more than NIS and PO adjuvants. The added cost of MSO and increased risk of crop injury when used at high temperatures have deterred people from using this class of adjuvants. Using reduced herbicide rates with MSO adjuvants can enhance weed control while lowering risk of crop injury. Minerals, clay, and organic matter in spray carrier water can reduce the effectiveness of herbicides. Hard water cations or micronutrients such calcium, magnesium, manganese, sodium, and iron reduce efficacy of all weak-acid herbicides. Calcium levels above 150 ppm and sodium bicarbonate levels above 300 ppm in spray water can reduce weed control in all situations. Ammonium nitrogen increases effectiveness of most weak-acid herbicides formulated as a salt. Fertilizers should always be used with herbicides unless prohibited by label. Ammonium ions greatly enhance herbicide absorption and phytotoxicity even in the absence of antagonistic salts in the spray carrier. However, enhancement of Roundup* and most other POST herbicides from ammonium is most pronounced when spray water contains large quantities of antagonistic cations. Herbicide enhancement by nitrogen compounds appears in most weed species but is most pronounced in species like volunteer corn and species that accumulate antagonistic salts on or in leaf tissue (lambsquarters, velvetleaf, and sunflower). AMS enhances phytotoxicity and overcomes salt antagonism for weak-acid herbicides formulated as a salt including glyphosate, growth regulators (not esters), ACCase inhibitors, ALS inhibitors, HPPD inhibitors, and Ignite. The antagonism may be overcome by increasing the glyphosate concentration relative to the cation content or by adding AMS and some water conditioners to the spray solution. Effective water conditioners include EDTA, citric acid, AMS, and some acidic AMS replacements. Of these, AMS has been the most widely adopted.