

Fertilizer Australia launches labelling awareness campaign

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Fertilizer Australia — the Australian fertiliser industry's peak body — has recently launched a national Fertiliser Labelling Awareness campaign to highlight:

- the importance of fertiliser labelling
- how to recognise the correct labelling of fertilisers, and
- the potential consequences of purchasing products that are not accurately labelled

It's a timely initiative because recent supply chain restrictions, resulting from COVID and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, have led to several examples of products being sourced from markets Australia is less familiar with and markets unfamiliar with Australia's labelling requirements.

Several of these consignments, primarily sold into the horticultural industry, had no labels at all! Some didn't even have correct Safety Data Sheets or Certificates of Analysis.

So, what's the potential impact of incorrect labelling?

Fertiliser labels contain vital information to help agronomists and farmers decide about nutrients for optimal crop yield and quality while caring for the environment and food safety.

While most fertilisers are not classified as dangerous goods, some products are scheduled poisons or hazardous substances. Labels provide this information so people transporting and handling the products stay safe.

Fertiliser labels also aid traceability, a requirement of quality assurance schemes such as Freshcare.

What should be on the fertiliser label?

Agronomists and farmers use fertiliser labels to determine the best product to meet their needs. We call this the four Rs.

**Right
nutrient or
product**

**Right
rate**

**Right
timing**

**Right
application
method**

That's why fertiliser labels must be descriptive and include all relevant information, such as the plant nutrients contained in a fertiliser, the form of the nutrient and its concentration. Nutrients may only be included on the label if they meet or exceed the concentrations in the tables on the page opposite.

Fertilisers can also contain contaminants that can accumulate in the food chain. Inorganic fertiliser labels should provide warnings on impurities when they exceed a “trigger concentration.” These contaminants include cadmium, lead, mercury, fluorine and biuret. For impurities of concern, maximum permissible concentrations (MPCs) have been set. It is often impossible to know if poorly labelled products exceed MPCs without a chemical analysis of the product.

Minimum nutrient concentrations in solid fertilisers	
Nutrient	Minimum (%w/w)
N, P, K, S, Ca, Mg, Si	0.5
Fe	0.1
Cu, Mn, Zn	0.05
B	0.02
Mo, Co, Se	0.001

Minimum nutrient concentrations in liquid fertilisers and soluble solids intended only for use in solution	
Nutrient	Minimum (%w/w)
N, P, K, S, Si	0.1
Ca, Mg	0.1
B, Cu, Fe, Mn, Zn,	0.005
Co, Se, Mo	0.001
Mo, Co, Se	0.001



This sample label shows the information that is required on a fertilizer label in Australia to be compliant with the National Code of Practice for Fertilizer Description and Labelling. Photo credit: Fertilizer Australia

So, what can go wrong?

There have been cases where the quality of imported fertiliser has not matched the certificate of analysis provided by the supplier. In one case, cadmium levels far exceeded the maximum permissible concentration.

In another, the “fertiliser” appeared to be simply soil. Usually, these issues are managed by the QA systems operated by the manufacturers and importers, including sampling and product analysis.

What can you do?

Fertilizer Australia members must have QA systems and labelling that meets the National Code of Practice for Fertilizer Description & Labelling.

This means you can purchase fertiliser products from Fertilizer Australia members with confidence.



You can check our members list at bit.ly/41P4qxB and you can find the National Code of Practice for Fertilizer Description and Labelling at bit.ly/3zfFHWk