

---

# DANGER, WARNING, CAUTION

Dave Palmer - Extension Agent I - Hillsborough County Extension Service

Recently at the Extension office, we received a question concerning why Funginex, which has the signal word DANGER on the label was available to the home and garden market. To answer that question, we need to discuss the meaning of signal words and specifically what the DANGER signal word means.

The signal words DANGER, WARNING or CAUTION, on a pesticide label give you information about how likely a pesticide is to cause “acute effects”. Acute effects are illnesses or irritations that may appear immediately after you are exposed - usually within 24 hours. Acute effects are usually obvious and treatable if you get prompt medical care. Pesticides may affect your eyes, nose, throat, lungs, stomach, or skin - depending on where you are exposed.



To decide what signal word to put on a product, the manufacturer must look at how harmful the pesticide might be through each route of entry like swallowing, inhaling, exposure to the skin or to the eyes. For many pesticides, some of these routes of entry are more dangerous than others. The signal word that applies to the most dangerous route of entry is the one that goes on the label.

\*\*\* If the signal word is CAUTION, the pesticide is only slightly hazardous by any of the routes of entry.

\*\*\* If the signal word is WARNING, the pesticide is moderately hazardous by at least one route of entry.

\*\*\* If the signal word is DANGER, the pesticide is highly hazardous by at least one route of entry.

The exact meaning of the signal word DANGER depends on whether or not it is accompanied by a skull and crossbones symbol and the word POISON. The word DANGER alone means that the pesticide's greatest hazard is that it can severely irritate your skin, your eyes or both. If the pesticide has the word DANGER plus the skull and crossbones symbol, it means that the pesticide is highly toxic through one or more routes of entry.



**Always read the label before using a pesticide.**

While the signal word tells you that the product has a certain level of hazard through at least one route of entry, it does not, by itself, tell you which kind of exposure it refers to or whether all routes of entry are equally dangerous. How can you find out more about the specific hazards of the product and about how to protect yourself? Two places on the label provide information about what kinds of exposures to be most careful of - the "Hazards to Humans" section and the

"Personal Protective Equipment" section. If available, an MSDS - Material Safety Data Sheet is another good source of information.

The labels "Hazards to Humans" section has precautionary statements that will usually help you figure out the hazards of the product. A typical label gives a brief explanation of how the product may affect you through each of the routes of entry. The type of personal protective equipment required by the label is also a good indication of which routes of entry are the main concerns.

Funginex has the signal word DANGER because it is a severe eye irritant. The "Hazards to Humans" statement indicates that fact. If Funginex were highly toxic (poisonous) through oral, dermal or inhalation exposure, it would have the word POISON and a skull and crossbones symbol. (Source: Pesticide Trainer & Examiner, 1995)