



Bruns: The voice on the other end of the line

Release Date: August 15, 2012

**Contact: Donna Gilson, 608-224-5130 or
Jim Dick, Communications Director, 608-224-5020**

MADISON – Bonnie Bruns is The Voice -- the voice that callers hear when they phone the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection to ask about their licenses to apply pesticides.

For more than 10 years, she's been the one who picks up the phone thousands of times a year and explains how to apply for a license, why the caller has not yet received a license, when the license expires, and all the complexities that licensing involves.

"Sometimes I'll get more than 100 calls a day. That's a stressful part of the job, but it's also a good part of my job," Bruns says. "I've gotten to know people over the years, and I've been able to help them, so I have a good rapport with them."

Bruns is a program associate for pesticide applicator certification and licensing. Translated, that means she is the clerical person who puts application packets together and mails them, checks completed applications to be sure they really are complete, enters them in computer records, and mails the completed licenses and certifications. And yes, in between, she answers those phone calls.

Licensing for individuals who apply pesticides is a two-step process. First, they must pass an exam for the particular category of license they want. There are about 20 different categories, such as landscape, structural, aerial and aquatic applications. That is the certification part of the process, and they need to do it only once every five years. But once certified, they must apply for a license annually. In addition, the department licenses businesses that apply pesticides and those that sell restricted-use pesticides – pesticides that you need a license to apply.

All told, Bruns processes about 12,000 licenses annually, and they all expire on December 31. So January to June is her busy time, processing licenses, overseeing some of the exam sessions, and answering calls.

"To many of those thousands of people, Bonnie is the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection," says Lori Bowman, director of the department's Agrichemical Management Bureau. "She may be the only contact they have with us, and we couldn't ask for a better representative. She's always calm and friendly, and she's as patient answering a question the thousandth time as she is the first time. She knows it's the first time for that caller, and she knows she's dealing with people's livelihoods."

"I had my 20-year anniversary of working for the state in May," Bruns says. Before arriving at the agriculture department in 2001, she spent nine years with what was then called the Department of Health and Family Services. There she handled complaints about nursing homes. "I burned out. It was just too sad," she remembers.

Bruns is a lifelong resident of McFarland. She waited until her children were in school before going back to school at Madison Area Technical College to learn data entry. Today those children are grown. She and her husband, Rusty, have four grown sons between them, two grandchildren, and another grandson on the way.

"The people here are good people," she says. "It makes it easy to come to work every day when you have good people to work with."



Bonnie Bruns processes 12,000 pesticide applicator licenses every year, and answers questions from thousands of callers.