Case Study: Expert Resource

CASE STUDY NOTICE
The following case study is designed to be instructive of the issues that should generally be addressed in the situation described; they are not an exhaustive list of actions for every similar situation faced by Extension employees. The particular facts of the situation will always dictate the appropriate response. Specific questions related to a particular fact pattern should be discussed with the proper Extension administrator(s).

SITUATION:

Your Extension program engages Master Gardener volunteers who are required to volunteer 5 hours each month responding to questions on the hotline. All volunteers are required to participate in training and education before working on the hotline so that they understand their roles and responsibilities, including working with the public.

Recently, you have been informed that one person has been providing information based on personal experiences rather than on research. Several people have contacted you directly, questioning the information they have been given. In fact, some community residents have complained that their trees have died after following the Master Gardener’s advice.

Instructions: Using the above situation, consider and discuss the following questions:
1. What is at risk for the organization and/or the individuals involved?
2. How would you suggest handling this situation? How do you respond to the volunteer? How do you respond to the community member?
3. What steps should be put in place to prevent this from happening?
4. What action should be taken concerning the volunteers status? How do you follow-up on the allegations being made?

Immediate response:
1. Document the complaint and tell the community member that you will check into the problem.
2. Ask the Master Gardener (volunteer) about his or her recent recommendations. Remind the volunteer of the proper protocol when making recommendations to local residents

Future solutions to situation:
• Create and maintain a log book of information such as calls received, specific recommendations given and the name of the volunteer answering the call.