Getting Ready to Combat West Nile

Mosquito abatement officials are hoping Bay Area serving Santa Clara, Southern Alameda, and Southern San Mateo Counties. If you've noticed mosquitoes buzzing around your home, chances are good they are coming from breeding sources around your neighborhood, perhaps even your own backyard.

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THE MOSQUITO AND VECTOR CONTROL ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA. MVCAC represents 61 special districts and other subdivisions of local government responsible for mosquito and vector control, surveillance of West Nile virus and other vector-borne diseases, and public education programs to help Californians protect themselves from disease. MVCAC advocates effective and environmentally friendly methods of mosquito and vector control. Elizabeth Cline, the General Manager of the Fresno Westside Mosquito Abatement District, is MVCAC's President.

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This year, according to experts, West Nile virus — a mosquito-borne disease that can cause debilitating illness and death to humans, avian species, horses and other wildlife — will once again threaten public health in California. In fact, during the recent West Nile Virus Conference in San Francisco, Dr. Lyle Peterson, Director of Vector-Borne Infectious Diseases Division for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), said “the potential for future outbreaks has never been greater” in California and other parts of the country (West Nile Could Get Worse, Experts Warn — SF Chronicle, February 24, 2006).

In 2005, West Nile virus killed 18 people in California, and threatened the lives of hundreds of others with neuroinvasive diseases like West Nile-related encephalitis and meningitis. Record rainfall late in the season (many Northern California counties are at or over 200 percent of normal for March and April) will only exacerbate California’s West Nile virus problem in 2006.

INCREASED FUNDING TO CONTROL WEST NILE VIRUS

The single best defense against West Nile virus is effective local mosquito control and to wage an effective battle against the disease in 2006 will require additional resources. In the FY 2005-2006 state budget, the Governor and Legislature provided $12 million in grants for mosquito control districts and other agencies in regions not served by mosquito control districts. Grant funds were used to hire temporary personnel and pay for mosquito control products and equipment. These funds undoubtedly saved lives and spared many others from the debilitating affects of West Nile-related illnesses. In fact, last year California had far, far lower death and illness rates than experienced in other states in recent years.

This year, MVCAC and other stakeholders are requesting $10 million to fund additional supplementary grants to local mosquito control agencies and areas without mosquito control. Unfortunately, these funds were not included in the Governor’s January Budget. MVCAC and its members seek legislative support for including these essential resources in the Governor’s May Budget revision to ensure that money is available to protect lives throughout the mosquito season.

Supplemental grants will ensure that local mosquito and vector control districts and areas without organized mosquito control have the resources to hire temporary personnel and buy mosquito control products to prevent and respond to West Nile virus outbreaks in California this year.

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR WETLANDS

MVCAC members continue to support efforts to maintain and restore wetlands throughout California and to create habitat conducive to waterfowl and other wildlife. In fact, in 2004 MVCAC worked with the California Waterfowl Association, the Department of Fish and Game and other stakeholders to create an ongoing program [AB 1982 (Wolk), SB 1545 (Karnette)] to implement best management practices — ecological-based mosquito controls — on state wetlands. This program is now reducing the West Nile virus risk, preserving mosquito control resources and encouraging the conservation of wetlands critical to waterfowl and other wildlife on state wetlands.

Nevertheless, there is a critical need for additional funding to expand this program to more state wetlands and to private wetlands that have the propensity to produce mosquitoes that serves as vectors — carriers — of West Nile virus and other diseases harmful to humans.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Mosquito and vector control districts dedicate significant resources every year to educate Californians on how best to protect themselves and their families from West Nile virus. To reach even more Californians, MVCAC and local districts urge state legislators to encourage their constituents to follow personal safety precautions recommended by the California Department of Health Services:

• Avoid spending time outside when mosquitoes are most active, at dawn and dusk, and especially for the first two hours after sunset.
• When outdoors, wear long pants, long-sleeved shirts and other protective clothing.
• Apply insect repellent containing the active ingredient DEET when outdoors, according to label instructions.
• Exclude mosquitoes from your home with tight fitting screens on doors and windows.
• Eliminate all sources of standing water on your property that can support mosquito breeding.
• Report significant mosquito infestations to your local vector control district.

MVCAC and local mosquito control agencies would welcome the opportunity to work with legislators in preparing West Nile virus public education materials for their constituents.