

## DO YOUR PART TO FIGHT THE BITE OF MOSQUITOES

By

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Mosquito control in California has been very successful at preventing major outbreaks of diseases for more than 60 years. These diseases, which include malaria, encephalitis and West Nile virus, have been effectively prevented because of the proactive measures performed by local special districts to reduce mosquito populations. However, a combination of economic adversity, regulatory changes and legal challenges will have a significant impact on the quality of life California citizens have become accustomed to, in terms of mosquito control. These challenges and roadblocks will require all of us to take personal responsibility to protect public health.

Most Californians have been faced with the reality of an economic downturn, which has negatively affected our lifestyle. The banking industry crisis, the economic downturn and subsequent job loss have all contributed to the tremendous amount of home foreclosures, which makes effective mosquito control doubly challenging.

The housing market pinch directly affects property values, resulting in a drop in property taxes, which funds much of the mosquito control in California. In addition, foreclosed homes often remain unoccupied for weeks—resulting in more potential sources of mosquito production on neglected properties. Unkempt yards with containers holding winter rainwater, damaged or unattended irrigation systems and neglected backyard swimming pools all create conditions that produce literally millions of mosquitoes—putting public health at great risk.

While local government is generally not supported by state revenues, the state is permitted to “borrow” local property tax dollars. The state will likely borrow revenues from local government because of the recent defeat of the state budget ballot measures. This borrow could mean a loss of eight percent of property tax dollars to all local government, including mosquito control. While mosquito control agencies certainly recognize that the state is facing a fiscal hardship, the public needs to know the ramifications of such a cut, coupled with the current foreclosure environment.

Op-Ed - 2

Mosquito and vector control agencies are also facing the challenges of a recent federal court ruling that will likely jeopardize effective mosquito control. The court ruling, which was based on restrictions from the Clean Water Act, will prevent use of a bacterium used by vector control agencies. This bacterium has been used for more than 30 years to effectively control mosquitoes in water.

If this ruling stands, it will likely increase the risk of West Nile virus (WNV) transmission among Californians because of the limitations on vector control agencies. WNV transmission resulted in 15 deaths in California and sickened more than 438 others in 2008, which proves the necessity of effective vector control. The court ruling limits resources and imposes enormous costs on vector control agencies—putting public safety at unnecessary risk, with minimal environmental benefit.

Mosquito control agencies believe that local tax dollars should be spent on the intended use—to protect the public from biting insects, reduce the potential for disease transmission and improve the quality of life. Mosquito control districts recognize the stewardship involved in protecting the environment and balancing the needs of the humans that live in it. Local mosquito districts apply pesticides using the most effective technologies and methodologies. Both larviciding and adulticiding are essential in order to provide the best possible control of nuisance and disease-carrying mosquitoes.

The public needs to be aware of and take personal responsibility to practice the Seven D's of mosquito prevention:

1. Drain standing water around your home.
2. Avoid Dawn, when mosquitoes are active.
3. Avoid Dusk, when mosquitoes are active.
4. Dress appropriately by wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outside.
5. Defend yourself with an effective mosquito repellent. Be sure to follow label instructions.
6. Door and window screens should be in working condition to prevent mosquitoes from entering your home.
7. Call you local District for any further help.

These next few years will surely present challenges for effective mosquito control. It is more important now than ever to work together to fight the bite of mosquitoes.

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## FACT SHEET

- The Seven D's of mosquito prevention are precautionary steps directing residents to take personal responsibility around their homes to lessen the susceptibility of mosquito production.
- The tremendous amount of home foreclosures in California has been an added challenge for effective mosquito control. Foreclosed homes often remain unoccupied for weeks—resulting in more potential sources of mosquito production on unkempt properties. Neglected backyard swimming pools can produce millions of mosquitoes.
- The state will likely borrow revenues from local government because of the recent failing state budget ballot measures. This borrow could mean a loss of eight percent of property tax dollars to mosquito control.
- West Nile virus transmission resulted in 15 deaths in California and sickened more than 428 others in 2008.
- Mosquito control in California has been very successful at preventing major outbreaks of diseases for more than 60 years. These diseases include malaria, encephalitis and West Nile virus.
- The court ruling, which was based on restrictions from the Clean Water Act, will prevent use of a bacterium used by vector control agencies. This bacterium has been used for more than 30 years to effectively control mosquitoes in water. (*National Cotton Council of America, et al. v. United States Environmental Protection Agency – 6th Cir. Jan. 7, 2009*)
- The court ruling limits resources and imposes enormous costs on vector control agencies—putting public safety at unnecessary risk, with minimal environmental benefit.
- More than 60 mosquito and vector control districts throughout the state are members of MVCAC.
- MVCAC strives to provide quality public information, comprehensive mosquito and vector-borne disease surveillance, training to high professional standards, and effective legislative advocacy on behalf of California mosquito and vector control districts.