



BEYOND PESTICIDES

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Widespread Spraying of Mosquito Pesticides Called Into Question, Health Advocates Say More Effective and Protective Methods Are Available

Given the number of Wile Nile virus (WNV) cases, including 26 deaths, it is important to focus attention on mosquito management methods that are the most effective and do not introduce additional short- and long-term public health hazards with the use of toxic pesticides, public health advocates say. It is understandable that local, state, and federal officials want to act decisively, but that does not mean that the widespread use of hazardous pesticides is the best course of action, according to Beyond Pesticides, a national information and advocacy organization on pesticides and alternatives based in Washington, DC. According to Beyond Pesticides' executive director, Jay Feldman, "Communities that are most successful and smart about mosquito control engage in aggressive efforts to reduce and eliminate mosquito breeding areas in standing water around homes and buildings and throughout the community." Mosquito breeding can take place in stagnant water, from very small to larger pools –bottle caps, discarded automobile tires, planters, containers, rain gutters, drains, or under piles of leaves.

The widespread spraying of toxic pesticides (typically chemicals known as synthetic pyrethroids, organophosphates, or other nervous system poisons) does not provide a long-term sustainable solution to mosquito control. "It has been shown that spraying pesticides that target adult mosquitoes is the least effective strategy, as well as the most risky response, since the pesticides used are linked to numerous adverse health effects, including respiratory inflammation, headaches, nausea, cancer, endocrine disruption, and other serious chronic diseases," said Nichelle Harriott, staff scientist at Beyond Pesticides.

According to experts, the threat of WNV is best managed through an integrated program that does not expose vulnerable populations to pesticides, including children, pregnant women, the elderly and people with compromised immune or nervous systems. The most effective program to protect the public from WNV focuses on removing breeding areas, stopping mosquitoes at the larval stage, and mass public education on prevention and precaution.

Beyond Pesticides advises communities to adopt a preventive, health-based mosquito management plan and has several resource publications on the issue, including the *Public Health Mosquito Management Strategy: For Decision Makers and Communities*, found online at www.beyondpesticides.org/mosquito.

What people can do:

Clean up – ensure waterways are clear of debris; eliminate pooled or stagnant waters from debris, containers, drains, and pools.

Natural Predators – Use indigenous fish populations, like bluegills or minnows, to eat mosquito larvae in shallow waters and ornamental pools. Copepod crustaceans can also be used to eat mosquito larvae in ditches, pools and other areas of stagnant water.

Least-toxic Pesticide Options

Use *Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis (Bt)*, a biological larvicide that prevents mosquitoes from developing into breeding, biting adults, in standing waters that cannot be drained.

Behavior Modification -wear long sleeves and long pants/skirts, and use least-toxic mosquito repellent when outdoors. Avoid being outside at dusk when mosquitoes are most active.