

WINDOW ON AGRICULTURE

Office of the Sonoma County Agricultural Commissioner

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West Nile Virus

West Nile Virus has now been officially found in Sonoma County. Although the prevention of vector borne diseases is not under the auspices of the Agricultural Commissioner's Office we often get many questions regarding them. The agency that deals with the prevention of vector borne diseases in Sonoma County is the Marin/Sonoma Mosquito and Vector Control District (SMM&VCD). This agency fights a year round battle to control/prevent vector borne diseases.

The SMM&VCD uses an Integrated Pest Management approach to control the mosquito population. Most of the methods used for control target the larval stage of the mosquito since they are the least costly and most effective methods. Control methods include: habitat modification, mosquito fish, microbial insecticide (*Bacillus thuringiensis israeliensis*), juvenile hormone, and larvicidal oils.

There are also several things that people can do to protect themselves from mosquitoes by using a variety of strategies that include maintaining fine mesh screens on windows and doors in good repair; checking for standing water; draining standing water or add mosquito-eating fish; and wearing repellents and protective clothing outdoors during the mosquito season.

The Marin/Sonoma Mosquito & Vector Control District can be reached at: (707) 285-2200; or (800) 231-3236; or their website at: www.ms mosquito.com



Safe Use of Insect Repellents

Along with the warm days of summer come the biting and stinging insects of summer. Now that West Nile Virus has been found in Sonoma County more people may be considering using insect repellents. Insect repellents are pesticides and as such you should take care in the selection and use of them.

Choosing Insect Repellents

Insect repellents are available in various concentrations and formulations – aerosols, sprays, liquids, creams, and sticks. An extra strength product may not provide extra protection. Although you may need to apply it more often, a lower strength product lessens your chances of an adverse reaction to a chemical. You may also want to consider non-chemical ways to deter biting insects – screens, netting, long sleeves, closed shoes, and slacks. Check the container to ensure that the product has a U.S. EPA-approved label and registration number. This means the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has approved the product for

safe and effective use. Follow label directions carefully, use no more than directed, under the conditions specified, and for the purpose listed. For example, if you need a tick repellent, make sure that the product label lists this use. If ticks are not listed, the product may not work well against them.

Using Insect Repellents Safely

The California Department of Pesticide Regulation recommends these precautions when using insect repellents:

- You should read all label directions before using the product and follow them carefully.
- Not all repellents are intended to be applied to the skin. If application is allowed, you should apply repellents only to exposed skin and/or clothing (as directed on the product label).
- You shouldn't use them under clothing. Read the label carefully.
- Some repellents damage certain fabrics and plastics (including vinyl car seats).
- You shouldn't use repellents over broken or irritated skin, or apply to eyes and mouth. With young children, do not apply to their hands, which often end up in their mouths. You should avoid breathing a repellent spray. Do not use near food.
- Although reactions to repellents are rare, it is always best to use them sparingly. Heavy application and saturation are unnecessary for effectiveness.
- Start with a low-concentration product and reapply if necessary.
- Better to build up to an effective level of protection than to start with more than you need.
- Once you're back indoors, wash treated skin with soap and water. This is particularly important when you use repellents repeatedly in a day or on consecutive days.
- If you suspect that you or your children

are reacting to an insect repellent, wash treated skin and then call your local poison control center. If you go to a doctor, take the repellent container with you.

The information above was taken from "Itching for a Repellent? Follow These Safety Tips" a consumer handout from the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR). To view the entire handout or other pesticide safety information go to DPR's website at www.cdpr.ca.gov

