

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



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To: News Desk Editor

Subject: **Residents Play a Key Role In Mosquito Control and West Nile Virus Prevention**

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It's summertime, and the County's mosquito control staff are slogging and sweating through the marshes hunting for verminous mosquito larvae. However, Santa Cruz County Mosquito and Vector Control District would like to remind residents that backyard breeding often produces some, if not more of a neighborhood's mosquitoes. Standing water in small containers can produce over 1,000 mosquitoes per month! Mosquitoes lay eggs in still water, which hatch into wriggling larvae that develop and emerge within two weeks as adults hungry for blood. Predators such as aquatic insects and fish are usually not present as they are in natural water bodies, so a high percentage of the larvae survive.

Mosquito breeding containers typically found around homes include:

animal troughs	disused pools & spas	tarps /pool covers
plant pots	tires	garbage cans
buckets	boats	clogged rain gutters
ornamental ponds	birdbaths	

Preventing the breeding is often as easy as draining the water, covering containers or obtaining mosquito-eating fish, and requires no pesticide use. The District finds that while many residents are diligent in eliminating standing water, still many more are unaware or indifferent to mosquitoes breeding on their property. For example, flooding beneath a Watsonville home produced a severe mosquito infestation throughout the neighborhood for several weeks. Many hours of effort were spent by the District to locate the source. The nearby marshes were not the problem!

Mosquitoes present more than just a biting nuisance. There is an increasing threat of the introduction of new mosquitoes and mosquito-borne diseases. **West Nile Virus (WNV)**, originally from Africa, has killed 26 people and sickened hundreds more since it was discovered in New York in 1999, and is steadily spreading westwards via migratory bird hosts. Vector-borne disease biologists estimate that the virus could arrive on the west coast within two years. "Typical West Nile viral infections in people are mild inflammation of the brain with symptoms that include fever, headache, body aches, skin rash and swollen lymph glands. More severe infection may be marked by headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, paralysis and, rarely, death," said a report from the Center for Disease Control. WNV has also killed tens of thousands of birds and hundreds of horses.

Several mosquito species can vector WNV and other forms of encephalitis. The mosquito vector of concern in our area is the "house mosquito" *Culex pipiens*. The house mosquito is ubiquitous throughout the County and typically breeds in sources of highly organic standing water. These sources of water can be difficult to find and can include: septic systems, street

catch basins, beneath truck scales, clogged roof gutters, as well as more obvious sources like various containers holding water and leaf litter. The house mosquito readily enters houses, and feeds primarily at night, as many of us are well aware.

Mosquito control is a battle worth choosing. The number of mosquitoes emerging from a single bucket of water can affect an entire neighborhood, but will affect the nearest homes the most. Residents often have more power than the District in controlling neighborhood mosquitoes, since it is not feasible for the District to inspect everyone's backyard. Thus, residents can make significant reductions in mosquito populations, and help prevent mosquito borne diseases. It's a good reason to talk with a neighbor.

For more mosquito control ideas, to obtain mosquitofish, or to report mosquito activity, contact the Santa Cruz County Mosquito and Vector Control District at 454-2590.

The following precautions would help protect against mosquito bites:

- Mosquitoes are most active at dusk, so when engaging in outdoor activities, wear long pants, long sleeve shirts and other protective clothing and apply insect repellent according to label instructions.
- Keep infants indoors during peak mosquito hours. If outside, cover cribs, bassinets or playpens with suspended mosquito netting.
- Find and eliminate all sources of standing water around property that can support mosquito breeding.
- Fix those screens, install screen doors and replace the porch light with a yellow bug light that won't attract mosquitoes.