

MOSQUITO PREVENTION PLANNING WITH THE REGIONAL AGENCIES OF ALAMEDA COUNTY

Fred C. Roberts

Alameda County Mosquito Abatement District
3024 East 7th Street, Oakland, California 94601

It is a pleasure to be discussing methods to provide mosquito control through the planning process. I would like to provide a brief overall view of our source prevention program and then focus on the District's approach to planning with regional agencies.

Richard Husbands of the State Bureau of Vector and Waste Management made the following statement in a paper presented to this association eight years ago:

"If source reduction principles are used to correct the problem before it occurs, then the time spent in man-hours that helps to prevent a mosquito problem can be balanced against average district costs normally associated with an uncorrected problem of this type"

The sentence successfully covers the elements of source prevention. Mr. Husbands is not satisfied with simply correcting a problem through preventive planning, but just as important, documenting the process in a manner that would prove or disprove its cost-effectiveness.

Alameda County is particularly fertile ground for a source prevention program. Many kinds of mosquito problems can be produced as an incidental by-product of man's activities. There are potential mosquito problems inherent in sewage treatment, underground water recharge systems, gravel harvesting operations, and irrigation. Land development can create storm drain systems, ornamental ponds, septic tanks, swimming pools - - all potential mosquito sources.

Most dramatic, perhaps, are the increased activities to create wetlands in the San Francisco Bay Area, including salt water, wastewater and freshwater marshes.

The kind of land and water-project development in Alameda County and the rate at which it is occurring, strongly suggests that an aggressive source reduction program would pay dividends. Fortunately, perhaps as never before, the legal environment is conducive to the District's involvement in the planning processes of development. The planning procedures established by the California Environmental Quality Act and the permit processes established by the regional regulatory agencies are relatively new and can be used effectively for mosquito source prevention purposes.

The Board of Trustees of the Alameda County Mosquito Abatement District developed a "Source Reduction Policy" that specifically states that source prevention is an integral part of our source reduction program. The policy reads in part: "Source reduction shall be accomplished through District review of governmental planning processes, . . .". It may seem trivial to mention, but some governmental agencies have actually directed their staff to stay out of planning. We feel we shouldn't miss the opportunity to prevent a mosquito problem when it can be done most inexpensively, i.e., before it is created.

One of the keys to the effectiveness of our program depends upon the local planners being aware that we are interested in "water-involved projects". One of our first steps in establishing contact with the planners was to modify and distribute the "Checklist for Reviewing Environmental Impact Reports for Potential Mosquito Problems", a document pro-

duced by the Source Reduction Committee of the California Mosquito Control Association. Although the document provided a good first step, constant effort by our staff is necessary to assure that planners remember that we exist. In spite of these efforts, occasional projects are not directed to the District for review.

Our source prevention program is triggered into action by a variety of inputs. We receive Environmental Impact Reports from agencies, permit notices from regulatory agencies, planning notices from planners and referrals from various sources. We are also alerted to projects by field observations of our staff, and by reviewing negative declarations.

Our first steps in the prevention process is to review the document and inspect the site of development. We have recently begun using an inspection form to be filled out for each project. The form is designed to help detect problems, make a permanent record, and be used as a basis to formulate solutions. The form asks the inspector three basic questions:

- 1) Are there mosquito problems at the development site?
- 2) Will the existing sources be eliminated by the project?
- 3) Will the project create new mosquito problems?

Finally, the form asks the inspector to make recommendations based upon his inspection and review of the proposed project. The recommendations are designed to eliminate existing sources or prevent new ones through the development.

The output of our source prevention program is our formal written recommendations to the planners or others. Because we find we are responding many times to the same kinds of problems, we have developed "Standard Recommendations" for the prevention of a number of types of sources including gravel harvesting operations, freshwater holding ponds, stream modifications, flood control channels, and catch basins.

REGIONAL GOVERNMENT.—Many of the kinds of problems we deal with are common to all the vector control agencies of the Bay Area. The Coastal Region of the California Mosquito Control Association has developed standard recommendations to prevent mosquito problems in the most important of those common problems: (1) salt marsh restoration projects, (2) dredge material disposal, and (3) fresh and wastewater marsh creation.

The Bay Area is blessed, or cursed, with a number of regional agencies. The San Francisco Bay Corps of Engineers now has jurisdiction not only of the navigable rivers and bay, but the tributaries. The San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission regulates development along the shoreline. The association of Bay Area Government has been given the responsibility to administer the Environmental Management and the 208 Surface Runoff Program. Finally, more restricted, yet still with regional influence, are the East Bay Regional Park District, the East Bay Discharge Authority, and the South Bay Wildlife Refuge.

The vector control agencies of the Coastal Region of the California Mosquito and Vector Control Association and the SDH Section of Vector and Solid Waste Management have presented a united front to these agencies. The efforts, as you are probably already aware, have resulted in streamlined permit

systems for source reduction and source prevention work that falls within the regulation of regional agencies.

The regional activities of the mosquito control agencies of the Coastal Region has provided some obvious advantages to the Alameda County Mosquito Abatement District.

- 1) We have avoided conflicts with other vector agencies by using standard recommendations that have been developed and approved by all the local vector agencies.
- 2) Our agency's status has been elevated to the regional level through the activities of the Coastal Region.
- 3) We have enjoyed the benefits of sharing the technical expertise and staff of the vector agencies of the Coastal Region.
- 4) Perhaps most surprising of all, we find the "Standard Recommendations" of the region are leading the way in wetland design criteria, an eventuality that puts our mosquito control District in a strong position in the planning stages of wetlands.

LESSONS LEARNED.—The staff of the District has learned a number of lessons while implementing our prevention program. Here are some of the most important.

Lesson I.—NO ONE DOES IT BETTER. We have studied plans done by experts in ornithology, wildlife, salt marshes, and on and on. Unequivocally, the lesson stands out that no one does preventive mosquito control planning unless we do it.

Lesson II.—HOW EASY THEY FORGET. Unless we constantly make efforts to keep key people aware of our concern, we are forgotten and mosquito problems are overlooked in planned developments.

Lesson III.—WE MUST NOT EQUIVOCATE — — BE SPECIFIC. We once commented on a Draft EIR that there was not enough information to predict whether a mosquito problem will be created. They responded by saying in essence, we were correct. We should have said the report was inadequate and asked for specific information.

Lesson IV.—BEWARE OF THOSE TOO EAGER TO ACCEPT OUR RECOMMENDATIONS. We have seen situations where the real or imagined influence of our agency has been used by developers. They use our recommendations, which happen to suit their purposes, to reject the conflicting recommendations of another agency. In actuality, our recommendations most often can be designed to be compatible with many objectives.

Lesson V.—WE MUST CONTINUE TO LEARN FROM OUR MISTAKES. We have made a number of mistakes, mostly of omission. We must document our effort and results precisely in order to learn from our past errors.

CONCLUSION.—If we are to determine whether or not we have an effective mosquito prevention program in Alameda County, we should know the following (1) the quantity of sources currently existing in Alameda County, (2) the rate at which new sources are being created by natural processes and the activities of man, (3) the rate at which the sources are being eliminated, and (4) how effective the District is at preventing new mosquito sources by our preventive planning program.

The program is currently in its infancy. We know the answer to only two of the above four questions. We hope we have put the proper forces in motion to provide answers to all of the four questions.