July 2, 2019

MCHD begins aerial spraying for mosquitoes

MOBILE, Alabama — The Mobile County Health Department (MCHD) provides a comprehensive program through its Vector Services department to battle mosquitoes. Part of the arsenal is an airplane that will spray insecticides along coastal areas and in other places that are inaccessible by truck. The initial flight of this season took place Monday.

“Our pilot sprayed Dauphin Island last night and is going to spray the area around Hollingers Island tonight,” said Paul Efird, an entomologist who oversees Vector Services. “Surveillance trapping is showing an increase in the number of salt marsh mosquitoes in the southern part of the county. Salt marsh mosquitoes have a large flight range, documented as more than 50 miles.

“In preparation for July Fourth festivities, the airplane will cover large areas of this habitat in an attempt to control these mosquitoes before they can disperse into the city or nearby communities. While these are mostly nuisance species, they are capable of carrying diseases.”

Vector Services personnel are very conscious of any affects when spraying from the plane.

“We have always conducted mosquito control activities on Dauphin Island,” Efird said. “We try our best to target land and avoid getting chemicals into the Gulf. The pesticide used in the plane has a half-life of about 72 minutes while airborne, and one to two days once it is deposited on foliage or ground. It binds well to soil and doesn’t run off or contaminate ground water.

“The application rate is 0.7 ounces per acre, less than 1.5 tablespoons spread across 43,560 square feet. Any product that happens to be deposited in the Gulf is quickly diluted well below the threshold to impact aquatic organisms.”

The plane is a Cessna 182Q. The plane’s tail number is N987FM, which the staff says indicates “For Mosquitoes!” The words “Mosquito Control” were applied underneath the wings to help residents identify the craft when it flies overhead. Also added to the front of the Cessna was a “MCHD Mosquito Defeater” logo, reminiscent of a World War II fighter plane.

While Vector Services works all year to control the local mosquito population, residents also must play a role. “The public is asked to partner with us by checking their own properties,” Efird said. “Empty anything holding water and leaving it overturned to prevent future mosquito breeding. Also, weekly clean your pets water bowls and any bird baths.”

To learn more about the battle to control mosquitoes, please visit http://mchd.org. Under the “Services” tab find “Vector Control” and then “Mosquito Control – General Information.” A mosquito complaint may be submitted to Vector Control by calling 251-690-8124 or via email at VectorServices@mchd.org.

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