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MCHD to begin aerial spraying for mosquitoes

MOBILE, Alabama — The Mobile County Health Department (MCHD) provides a comprehensive program through its Vector Control department to battle mosquitoes. The latest addition to 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 is set for tonight.

“The plane will be used when we have large hatchings of the saltwater mosquitoes,” said Jerry Folsie, who oversees Vector Control. “These are different from the *Aedes albopictus* mosquito that is our main disease-carrying mosquito. The saltwater mosquito is more of a nuisance, but it can also carry disease.”

The plane is a Cessna 182Q. The plane’s tail number is N987FM, which the staff says indicates “For Mosquitoes!” Sign Source applied the words “Mosquito Control” 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.

In the field of epidemiology, a “vector” is any agent — such as humans, mosquitoes and rodents — that carries and transmits an infectious disease into another living organism. According to the World Health Organization, vector-borne illnesses account for more than 17 percent of all infectious diseases, causing more than 1 million deaths each year.

MCHD has a year-round program to help deal with this problem. Activities includes mosquito surveillance, disease surveillance, public health education, larviciding (larvae control), and adulticiding (adult mosquito control) to track, monitor and control mosquitoes. Vector Control also assesses the potential for mosquito-borne diseases such as West Nile Virus (WNV), Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) and St. Louis Encephalitis (SLE) through its sentinel chicken program.

While Vector Control 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 and emptying out anything that they have that can hold water and leaving it overturned to prevent future mosquito breeding,” Folsie said.

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.