

Pennsylvania Launches 2003 West Nile Virus Surveillance Program

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Pennsylvania is launching this year's effort to detect and control mosquitoes that carry the West Nile virus.

"It's that time of the year again — time to get your yard back in shape or just get out and enjoy Pennsylvania's natural wonders," Acting Secretary Muscalus said. "But don't forget about the mosquitoes."

In 2002, West Nile virus was detected in 62 Pennsylvanians and contributed to the deaths of nine people. Last year's experience makes it clear that Pennsylvanians need to do their part to eliminate mosquito breeding areas around their homes."

When transmitted to people, West Nile virus most often causes mild infections like the flu, but on rare occasions the virus can cause West Nile encephalitis, an infection that can cause an inflammation of the brain. Anyone can get the virus, but older adults over 50 years of age are at increased risk of developing severe illness.

In addition to transmission through the bite of an infected mosquito, West Nile virus also has recently been shown to be transmitted through organ donation, blood transfusion, possibly mother to child (breastfeeding and transplacental) and occupational transmission. However, these other types of transmission account for a very small proportion of cases.

West Nile Virus cases occur primarily in the late summer or early fall, although mosquito season is usually April through October.

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is coordinating the county-based mosquito surveillance and control portion of the multi-agency effort.

"Along with our county partners, DEP will conduct an aggressive and proactive mosquito surveillance and control program again this year," Acting DEP Secretary McGinty said.

DEP and county West Nile coordinators will be looking for immature (larvae and pupae) and adult mosquitoes to determine if they are species known to carry the virus. They also will be noting their numbers and geographic distribution.

Mosquitoes known to carry West Nile virus that are detected in large numbers will be controlled using a powdered form of naturally occurring bacteria or a mosquito growth hormone, both of which are harmless to humans and aquatic life.

A vaccine is available for horses through veterinarians.

Acting Secretary Muscalus is reminding Pennsylvanians to report dead bird sightings. Dead bird sightings will be used to identify potential areas for enhanced surveillance. This year, Pennsylvanians can report dead birds two ways, online at www.westnile.state.pa.us or by calling 1-877-PA-HEALTH.

The West Nile surveillance program will collect up to five dead birds a week per county throughout the entire West Nile virus season. Citizens can call 1-877-PA-HEALTH to find out if their dead bird is appropriate for testing. If it is, they will be asked to deliver the bird to a centralized collection site.

Pennsylvanians can take a few simple steps around their homes to reduce their risk of contracting the West Nile virus. Because mosquitoes breed in standing water, even a small bucket that has stagnant water in it for four days can become home to many mosquitoes.

- Dispose of tin cans, plastic containers, ceramic pots or similar water-holding containers that have accumulated on your property. Do not overlook containers that have become overgrown by aquatic vegetation;

- Pay special attention to discarded tires that may have accumulated on your property;

- Drill holes in the bottom of recycling containers that are left outdoors. Drainage holes that are lo-

cated on a container's sides allow them to collect enough water for mosquitoes to breed;

- Clean clogged roof gutters on an annual basis, particularly if the leaves from surrounding trees have a tendency to plug up the drains.

- Roof gutters are easily overlooked but can produce millions of mosquitoes each season;

- Turn over plastic wading pools when not in use. A wading pool becomes a mosquito producer if it is not used on a regular basis;

- Turn over wheelbarrows, and do not allow water to stagnate in birdbaths for more than four days. Both provide breeding habitat for domestic mosquitoes;

- Aerate ornamental pools or stock them with fish. Water gardens are fashionable but become major mosquito producers if they are allowed to stagnate;

- Clean and chlorinate swimming pools that are not being used. Be aware that mosquitoes may even breed in water that collects on swimming pool covers; and

- Use landscaping to eliminate standing water that collects on your property. Mosquitoes will develop in any puddle that lasts for more than four days.

Last year, the West Nile virus was identified in 63 Pennsylvania counties. The only counties that did not have positive test results for 2002 were Elk, Cameron, Fulton and Carbon counties. The West Nile virus was identified in 1,737 birds, 674 mosquito groups, 97 horses, 43 sentinel chickens and 62 people, with nine human deaths.

A special website has been established to provide citizens with background information and regular updates about the West Nile virus and is available through the PA PowerPort at www.state.pa.us, PA Keyword: "DEP West Nile" or at www.westnile.state.pa.us. Visitors to the website can sign up to automatically receive news releases and other updates via e-mail.

State Farmers Can File For Fuel Tax Refunds

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — State Treasurer Barbara Hafer has announced that Pennsylvania farmers may file claims for liquid fuels tax refunds between July 1, 2002 and June 30, 2003.

Hafer, who chairs the Board of Finance and Revenue, said claim forms must be returned postmarked not later than September 30 to the Board of Finance and Revenue, Motor Fuels Section, 1101 S. Front St., Suite 410, Harrisburg, PA 17104-2540.

"Any person who uses liquid fuels in the actual production of agricultural products is eligible for refunds," Hafer said. Last year, board staff paid 8,524 claims for \$3,237,960 in refunds. The average claim paid was \$380.

The refund rates are 26.6 cents per gallon for gasoline purchased from July 1, 2002 to December 31, 2002 and 25.9 cents per gallon for purchases between January 1, 2003 and June 30, 2003. The refund rate is 31.8 cents per gallon for kerosene and diesel fuel pur-

chased between July 1, 2002 and December 31, 2002 and 30.8 cents per gallon for purchases between January 1, 2003 and June 30, 2003.

Each claim must include copies of paid receipts or a statement from the fuel dealer that shows the number of gallons purchased, purchase dates, and verification that the state taxes (liquid fuels and fuel use) were paid.

"Since changes in the rates took effect in the middle of the claim period, claims filed this year will be for a split tax period," Hafer said. "Claimants need to make sure receipts are separated by date to reflect the different tax rates. They should check any statements from fuel dealers to make certain the tax charged is properly reflected."

Claim forms are available from the Board of Finance and Revenue at the above address. Questions may be answered by calling (717) 787-6534 or e-mailing dfetters@tre.state.pa.us.

Ralstonia Outbreak In State Over

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA) officials announced last week that the Ralstonia outbreak is over in Pennsylvania, and all quarantines will be lifted within the next few weeks. The announcement comes just over two months since the original outbreak occurred.

Pennsylvania had the highest number of suspected cases in the nation, making PDA's job that much more difficult. PDA followed the lead of the U.S. Department of Agriculture but also had some flexibility in making decisions that were in the best in-

terest of Pennsylvania. For example, some media outlets have recently reported that all plants associated with samples confirmed positive for Ralstonia solanacearum race 3 biovar 2 would have to be destroyed, not just those found positive.

PDA took a less stringent approach by ordering destruction on a case-by-case basis as conditions at individual establishments warranted. In the end, only 8 positive samples were found and only one facility was required to destroy a large amount of its greenhouse products.

Hershey Chosen Chairman Of State House Ag Committee

CAMP HILL (Cumberland Co.) — The selection of State Representative Art Hershey (R-13) to serve as chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee has been applauded by the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau. Speaker of the House John M. Perzel (R-172) appointed Rep. Hershey to the position to succeed Rep. Ray Bunt (R-147), who was chosen to serve as chairman of the House Consumer Affairs Committee.

"Rep. Hershey will be an excel-

lent chairman. As a farmer, he understands both the challenges and opportunities that agriculture presents. We know he will keep the concerns of the farm and rural sectors in the forefront of the General Assembly," said Guy F. Donaldson, president of the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau.

Hershey and his wife, Joyce, established Ar-Joy Holstein farm in Chester County, in 1959. Today, their son, Duane, operates the 400-acre family farm.

American Sheep Industry Association Conducting 2003 Photo Contest

DENVER, Colo. — Attention all photographers: It's time to start thinking about the American Sheep Industry Association's 2003 Photo Contest. The contest is open to all who wish to enter, which means you don't have to be involved in the U.S. sheep, lamb, wool, or goat industries to participate. The only rule is that your photograph must include sheep or goats. Entries must be postmarked by August 8.

Entries will be judged on clarity, content, composition, and appeal. A total of \$1,000 will be awarded, with awards of \$125 going to the grand prize winner in each of the four categories listed below; \$75 for the first runners-up in each category and a \$50 prize for the second runner-up in each of the four categories. (To increase your odds of winning, enter a category other than "Kids and Sheep" ... approximately half of our entries tend to fall into this category.)

- Action — Photographs of activities such as shearing, wool classing/skirting/baling, moving/

trailing sheep, lambing, tagging, showing, feeding, etc. (Note that all pictures featuring youth ages 18 and younger should be entered in the "Kids and Sheep" category.)

- Scenic — Photographs of sheep/goats outdoors. (Photos entered in this category cannot include people.)

- Kids and Sheep — Photographs containing pictures of youth 18 years of age or younger and sheep/goats.

- Open Category — Photographs of sheep/goats with other farm animals, i.e. cats, dogs, llamas, donkeys, etc., or sheep/goat pictures — without people — taken indoors, such as in a barn, shed, etc.

If you're confused about the category into which your photograph would fall, leave the category portion of your entry blank and ASI will categorize it for you!

For contest rules and entry information, call Laura Gerhard, ASI Communications Manager, at (303) 771-3500, ext. 30.

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Attention Farmers in Northern Lebanon County, PA: Please remember to Vote

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