Maine Board of Pesticides Control

Miscellaneous Pesticides Articles September–October 2013

(***identified by Google Alerts or submitted by individuals***)

Portland Press Herald

PRINTTHIS

September 6

Maine marijuana company fined $18K for using pesticides

In March, a state investigation found nine pesticides at the company's cultivation facility in Auburn.

By MICHAEL SHEPHERD Kennebec Journal

AUGUSTA — The operator of four of Maine's eight medical marijuana dispensaries was fined $18,000 on Friday for using pesticides on plants in violation of state law and program rules.

click image to enlarge

Becky Dekeuster

Contributed photo

In March, a state investigation of Wellness Connection of Maine, which has dispensaries in Hallowell, Portland, Thomaston and Brewer, discovered nine pesticides at the company's cultivation facility in Auburn and other facilities, finding 20 violations in all between May 2012 and March 2013.

The $18,000 penalty comes from the Maine Board of Pesticides Control for unlawful use of pesticides on marijuana. It has been negotiated over the past few months, but the board formally approved the penalty Friday, according to Henry Jennings, the board's executive director.

On Thursday, Wellness Connection officials said they already have paid the fine in full.

"We've now revamped our operations," said Patricia Rosi-Santucci, Wellness Connection's chief operating officer. "Now this is a thing of the past and we're focused on the future."

After requesting an analysis from the pesticide board, the Portland Press Herald reported that five of the nine pesticides the group was cited for using contain active ingredients that are safe for many uses and federally approved for use on tobacco. At the time, Wellness Connection served 2,400 patients.

In a summary of the settlement with Wellness Connection, the pesticides board said the pesticides were "potentially harmful" to patients using treated medical marijuana. The company agreed to the penalty in July.

Many of the pesticides contained natural active ingredients, such as vegetable oils. In March, the state didn't approve of any pesticide use on marijuana, so essentially any substance could be deemed a pesticide.

That's different now. Wellness Connection and other dispensaries lobbied legislators to support a bill that would allow some use of low-risk pesticides on plants. That bill, L.D. 1531, an emergency measure sponsored by Sen. Thomas Saviello, R-Wilton, became law in June.

Substances allowed under the bill are determined by a list of more than 30 active ingredients exempt from federal registration under Section 25(b) of the federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act. They are deemed virtually harmless and include sesame oil, soybean oil and peppermint oil.

In June, Kenneth Albert, director of the Department of Health and Human Services' Division of Licensing and Regulatory Services said that under the bill, each pesticide also would have to be registered for use in Maine.

If the substance were to be used on marijuana plants that would be turned into edible products, it would face more scrutiny, Albert said then.

However, Becky DeKeuster, Wellness Connection's executive director, said Thursday the company is using environmental and mechanical methods, along with insects, including parasitic wasps, to control pests.

She said the company complied with state law and rules "almost immediately." Rosi-Santucci said that was one of the mitigating factors the state used to reduce its original penalty of $25,000 to $18,000.

Now, she said, the company has no need to use even the pesticides it is allowed to use under state law.

"It's good to have the 25(b)s in the toolkit," DeKeuster said. "Are they one of the first things we'll use? No, they're probably one of the last."

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http://www.pressherald.com/news/Pot-grower-Wellness-Connection-fined-18K-for-using-pesticides.html

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BANGOR DAILY NEWS

Federal prohibition of medical marijuana continues to handcuff now-legal industry in Maine

Troy R. Bennett | BDN

Patricia Rosi is the chief operating officer at the Wellness Connection of Maine, a medical marijuana dispensary with four locations in the state. *Buy Photo*

By Seth Koenig, BDN Staff
Posted Sept. 06, 2013, at 12:35 p.m.

PORTLAND, Maine — Medical marijuana dispensaries were legalized here four years ago, but officials with Maine's largest distributor say even as the drug becomes one of the state's largest cash crops, the growth of the industry is hampered by the federal prohibition of pot.

And that's even without the specter of federal prosecution, as U.S. Justice Department officials have followed a hands-off approach to enforcement in states where medical cannabis is legal and subject to strong local oversight.

The list of underreported byproducts of the clash between state and U.S. marijuana laws goes on and on, said Patricia Rosi, chief operating officer of Wellness Connection of Maine, far and away the state's largest dispensary operator.

Most insurance plans, using federal guidelines, won't cover medical marijuana use. Distributors cannot apply for federal nonprofit status. Science laboratories are reluctant to do research on the drug because most are funded by federal grants. Patients can be legally denied jobs.

That's on top of the lingering stigma that Rosi said continues to follow and embarrass medical marijuana users.

It's a very different business landscape than exists for the state's signature wild blueberry industry, which by some estimates has already been surpassed in value by Maine's legal marijuana crop.

Unlike the iconic blueberries, cannabis is being credited with — as one patient said — "giving people their lives back."

Ruthann Carkhuff, 44, said she was diagnosed in 1996 with fibromyalgia and degenerative disc disease, conditions that sapped her of the ability to lift her limbs. Before starting to use medical marijuana about 21 months ago, Carkhuff couldn't hold her infant grandson.

"I couldn't even brush my hair, which we so often take for granted," she recalled. "Putting socks on or getting dressed was extremely difficult."

She'd tried "pretty much every single painkiller" available — including OxyContin — and finally found relief at Wellness Connection. Carkhuff said she takes "between two and four puffs in the afternoon" and the effects last through the evening.

"That's it. I don't do it to a point where, excuse my phrasing, I'm high or stoned, which is what most people think," she said.

"There's still a lot of misconceptions that need to be debunked about medical marijuana and what a medical marijuana patient looks like," Rosi said.

The value of the crop

Becky DeKeuster, executive clinical director of Wellness Connection, said there are no official or widely accepted numbers on the value of Maine's medical marijuana crop. Wellness Connection is the largest distributor, operating four of the state's eight total dispensaries — in Thomaston, Brewer, Portland and Hallowell — and has about 3,000 of the state's 4,500-plus dispensary patients.

Distributors are allowed under state law to have six marijuana plants per patient. A commonly referenced law enforcement estimate is that each marijuana plant is worth approximately $3,000. So, based on simplistic math, if all of the state's distributors grow their maximum number of plants, Maine's medical marijuana crop is worth about $81 million.

DeKeuster said Wellness Connection is growing "well below" its six-plant-per-patient maximum. But adding the patients who grow their own medical marijuana outside the dispensary system, which has been quietly allowed in Maine since 1999, brings the number of users up to a reported estimate of 13,000 Mainers.

If each patient, combining dispensary members with those who grow their own, is represented by even just two plants, that would put the value of the statewide crop at $78 million.

For comparison, Maine's wild blueberry harvest has been worth between $70 million and $80 million annually in recent years.

An annual state Department of Health and Human Services report released late last month found that the Maine Medical Use of Marijuana Program took in $612,370 in fees in 2012, $146,342 more than it spent to regulate the nascent industry.

A report by the Colorado-based publication Medical Marijuana Business Daily estimates that the medical marijuana industry will gross about $1.5 billion in sales nationwide this year, growing to about $6 billion per year by 2018.

Efforts to legalize the recreational use of marijuana statewide in Maine, as has been done in Washington and Colorado, fell flat in the Legislature this year. Portland residents, however, will get a chance on Nov. 5 to vote on an ordinance change that would decriminalize possession of small amounts of the drug in Maine's largest city.

Getting established

As the biggest and most recognizable entity in the field, Wellness Connection of Maine has become in some ways

the face of the state's medical marijuana industry.

And along the way, that face has gotten some black eyes.

Wellness Connection is still in the process of fighting a National Labor Relations Board complaint filed by the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, which alleges the company "unlawfully retaliated" against employees for trying to organize a labor union.

Wellness Connection, which expects to employ 50 people by the end of the year, has countered that it offers its workers good pay and benefits, and that employees hoping to unionize represent a minority.

Rosi said the organization's average employee is paid 43 percent more than the minimum wage, receives 100 percent health care coverage and is offered a 401K plan with a company match.

"They've filed a complaint with the NLRB that we're working on and going through that process," Rosi said. "If the majority of workers want to unionize, then they can unionize. But I haven't seen a majority interest in unionizing."

Before the emergence of the labor dispute, the organization was the subject of a high-profile investigation by the state Department of Health and Human Services in late March after word leaked it had been using pesticides at its Auburn indoor growing facility.

Rosi said Wellness Connection admitted to using several safe, organic pesticides such as sesame oil and canola oil, and were cited by state investigators because rules on the books at the time did not allow for any topical pesticides.

Since then, she said, the organization has begun using tiny parasitic wasps to battle back crop-eating aphids, and an emergency bill was passed by the Legislature to allow the use of "minimum risk" pesticide applications like many of those Wellness Connection was previously scolded for.

"Initially, the regulations said you couldn't use anything on cannabis and if you're growing tomatoes or anything else, you need some way to control pests," DeKeuster said. As a result of the dispute over Wellness Connection's practices, "Maine was one of the first — if not the first — in the country to clarify what it is we can use on cannabis."

On Friday, the state Board of Pesticides Control closed the book on the case officially by signing off on a negotiated $18,000 fine paid by Wellness Connection earlier in the summer.

In a statement provided to the Bangor Daily News on Thursday by DHHS spokesman John Martins, the department's Division of Licensing and Regulatory Services reported that "Wellness Connection has addressed all of our concerns to our satisfaction and has been cooperative with the division."

"Their program is compliant with the Maine Medical Marijuana Program rules and as such, they are fully licensed," the department statement said.

The struggle over pesticides reveals a number of ways in which the federal prohibition on medical marijuana continues to plague Maine distributors even though the practice is legalized at the state level.

State regulations allow a farmer growing corn to use any number of topical pesticides on the market that list corn crops as one of their federally approved applications, for example. But because marijuana isn't recognized as legal by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency or U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the entities that primarily regulate pesticides, cannabis is never listed as an approved crop.

So while Mainers may commonly be eating fruits and vegetables that were grown using pesticides, medical marijuana has fallen outside the purview of the makers and regulators of pesticides, leaving almost all of them off-limits.

The federal prohibition is impactful in another way on the pesticides front as well: It scares away many scientists who could otherwise prove that certain organic applications are safe.

"We couldn't even spray lemon juice on the leaves of a 6-inch-tall plant," DeKeuster recalled.

"There have been no clinical trials on what happens when lemon juice is inhaled," Rosi added. "A lot of laboratories are funded by federal grants, and they refuse to work on our crops because they're worried about losing federal grant funding."

Medical marijuana patients

From the patient side, the federal prohibition of medical marijuana presents different challenges, but the U.S. government isn't the only one giving disapproving looks.

"When people think of marijuana dispensaries, they think of small, dark, gloomy places where people are all wearing tie-dye," Rosi said. "We're exactly the opposite."

In one of the first media interviews allowed by Wellness Connection inside its Portland dispensary, located off Congress Street behind Local 188 restaurant, Rosi and DeKeuster sat in an open, brightly lit space with lime green walls decorated with images of birch trees.

A few couches, tables and brochure racks represented the only furnishings in an environment more clean and illuminated than many of the city's popular coffee shops.

DeKeuster said the organization's average patient is a male in his mid-50s.

"We see a lot of folks dealing with cancer, we see a lot of folks dealing with chronic pain," she said.

"Contractors, fishermen, lobstermen," Rosi added.

But one patient, Colleen Jones-Turner, 52, said she expects that one of her doctors may drop her when her name appears in print for a story about medical marijuana.

"It isn't easy to be a medical marijuana patient," said Jones-Turner, who was diagnosed with epilepsy as a child. "For years, I had doctors who would say, 'We want you on medical marijuana,' but none of them would prescribe it because they were scared of getting a reputation."

Fellow patient Carkhuff, battling fibromyalgia and degenerative disc disease, said her mother still struggles to accept her choice of medical treatment. The worst of it, Carkhuff said, has been explaining her condition and medicine to employers.

"I was denied two positions and they did explain to me it was because of the medical cannabis," she said. "I was glad they were honest, but they said, 'We'd rather have someone with a clean urine test and someone we know.'"

DeKeuster said based on the latest legal precedents, employers can fire or refuse to hire someone for testing positive for marijuana even when that person is legally using the drug medicinally.

"Somebody out in their car rolling a joint reflects on all of us, but that's not representative of who we are [in the medical marijuana field]," DeKeuster said.

Additionally, insurance plans don't cover medical marijuana because of its status as a federally outlawed substance, she said.

"We do have a low-income program for folks on MaineCare or other programs, because we do realize that some patients are having to decide between medicine and food or rent," DeKeuster said.

"Costs [to the patients] will vary widely depending on many factors, including the size and type of product a patient chooses," she later added. "As one example, a patient who needs to use an ounce of flower medicine a month may spend between $150 and $350. We make every effort possible to ensure that cost is not a barrier to safe access."

But the lack of insurance help remains another federal hurdle in the fledgling state industry, Rosi said.

"This is really an emerging industry. When was the last time an underground industry went above-ground? There

was alcohol prohibition [in 1933] and then this," Rosi said. "So much of what we're up against is fear. Doctors fear something. The patients fear other things, neighbors and community members fear something. Employers have fear and employees have fear. How do you remove fear?"

http://bangordailynews.com/2013/09/06/health/federal-prohibition-of-medical-marijuana-continues-to-handcuff-now-legal-industry-in-maine/ printed on September 10, 2013

More Mosquito Pools Test Positive for Eastern Equine Encephalitis in York County

Maine Department of Health and Human Services

Mary C. Mayhew, Commissioner **www.maine.gov/dhhs**

Date: August 30, 2013

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:
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NEWS RELEASE

More Mosquito Pools Test Positive for Eastern Equine Encephalitis in York County

AUGUSTA – Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention has confirmed the presence of Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) in mosquito pools from the towns of Alfred and York in York County. This increases the number of mosquito pools from Maine to test positive for EEE in 2013.

According to Dr. Sheila Pinette, Director of Maine CDC, additional positive tests are likely. “We still have plenty of warm weather ahead in the next few weeks and this increases the possibility of additional positive pools.”

EEE is a virus that is transmitted through the bite of an infected mosquito. It can cause serious illness in humans, large animals like horses and some species of birds. Maine confirmed EEE in a flock of pheasants during 2012 and experienced unprecedented EEE activity during 2009 with multiple animals and mosquito pools testing positive for the virus.

Regionally, all of our surrounding states have also identified EEE in 2013 including mosquito pools in New Hampshire, Vermont, and Massachusetts. Two horses have tested positive for EEE in Massachusetts as well. Massachusetts has also had a resident confirmed with EEE.

“EEE is a very serious illness” says Dr. Stephen Sears, State Epidemiologist, “Mainers need to take appropriate precautions against mosquitoes to prevent this illness.”

Maine CDC recommends the following preventative measures to protect against EEE and other mosquito-borne illnesses:

- Use an Environmental Protection Agency-approved repellent when outdoors,

especially around dawn and dusk. Always follow the instructions on the product's label;
- Wear protective clothing when outdoors, including long-sleeved shirts, pants and socks;
- Keep window and door screens down to keep mosquitoes out of the home;
- Limit time outdoors at dawn and dusk when many species of mosquitoes are most active;
- Remove containers holding water in and around the home, as water can attract mosquitoes.

Maine's Health and Environmental Laboratory (HETL) routinely performs testing for EEE and West Nile virus (WNV) in mosquitoes, large animals and humans. Maine stopped testing individual dead birds for mosquito-borne illnesses in 2006 and no longer uses them as an indicator for disease.
Maine CDC will continue to update information on mosquito-borne disease surveillance in Maine on a weekly basis. These reports are posted every Monday from May through September at http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/vector-borne/arboviral-surveillance.shtml
Future positive tests will be announced through this report.
Information on pesticides and repellents is available at the Maine Board of Pesticides Control website at:
http://www.maine.gov/agriculture/pesticides/public/index.htm#mosquito

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Portland Press Herald

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Posted:Today
Updated: 8:39 AM

Maine schools, sports keeping eye on EEE

Schools reset games so they end before dusk, and towns consider spraying to avoid being infected by mosquitoes.

By North Cairn ncairn@pressherald.com
Staff Writer

The detection of more mosquitoes infected with the Eastern equine encephalitis virus is prompting schools and municipalities in southern Maine to reschedule evening events and do additional pesticide spraying to protect residents from exposure.

click image to enlarge

Kennebunk High School has sprayed athletic fields and rescheduled athletic games so they end before dusk, like several schools in York County, because of concern over increasing evidence of mosquitoes infected with the Eastern equine encephalitis virus.

Gregory Rec/Staff Photographer

Schools across the region are carefully watching the results of state monitoring of EEE, said Michael Burnham, assistant executive director of the Maine Principals' Association. The schools are considering whether to reschedule night games and other outdoor activities, he said, "and we support those schools' measures."

The guiding principle is minimizing risk by limiting exposure, said Burnham. "Safety (should come) first," he said. "The welfare of kids and fans, too."

In York, where some of this year's 21 positive EEE test results have originated, a second round of pesticide spraying was done Monday night, said Zak Harding, facilities director for the York School Department. The perimeters of all athletic fields, schools and town buildings were covered, he said.

Such spraying was done earlier in the season, and the school district has already changed the hours of athletic events to avoid evening home games, said Ted Welch, York High School's athletic director. Kennebunk and Wells high schools also reportedly moved some game times earlier.

The hours of athletic events at York High will be re-examined on Oct. 1, Welch said. The restriction on night play could be extended, but the hope is that colder weather will soon kill off mosquitoes.

The National Weather Service projects Oct. 1-15 as the likely period in which frost will first occur in many parts of Maine.

Officials in Kittery -- where the latest discovery of EEE was made Friday -- said they are assessing the situation weekly to determine the level of risk and what measures are needed and appropriate.

"At this time we have made a decision not to spray," said Mike Roberge, assistant principal and athletic administrator for Traip Academy, the town's high school. "We are monitoring closely weekly updates and recommendations being sent by the (Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention) and the Maine Department of Education ... and will continue to monitor this situation closely," Roberge said.

The issue of evening games is moot at Traip Academy because the school does not have lights and all games are played in the afternoon, Roberge said.

Farther north in Saco, games and practices that might run after dusk are being moved to earlier times, said Joe Hirsch, director of the parks and recreation department, even though the virus has not been detected in the city.

The events are being rescheduled to ensure that everyone leaves the fields before sunset, he said.

Later this fall, events will be scheduled even earlier to compensate for the shorter hours of daylight, he said.

"It is inconvenient," he said. "But (we're) ending things a little earlier to be on the safe side."

No spraying of pesticides has been done or planned, said Hirsch. That would require approval by the City Council, he said, and has not yet been seen as warranted.

This is Maine's worst year for EEE in the past five years. Since mid-August, the virus has been detected in a growing number of monitoring sites, called mosquito pools, over a growing area of southern Maine, from coastal York and Kittery as far west as Oxford.

Infected mosquitoes were found last week in 13 more mosquito pools, the CDC reported, raising the total number for this summer to 21 pools.

West Nile virus was found late last week in a mosquito pool in Alfred, health officials have reported.

EEE and West Nile virus are spread through the bite of infected mosquitoes. Of the two infections, EEE is far more serious, involving potential inflammation of the brain and, occasionally, coma and death.

Many people who are bitten by mosquitoes infected with West Nile virus may experience mild flu-like symptoms and never know they have been affected.

EEE has never yet been diagnosed and reported in a Maine resident. However, in 2008, a

Massachusetts resident who may have been infected while vacationing in Cumberland County died from the virus, the Maine CDC has reported.

EEE occurs in the eastern half of the U.S. and causes serious disease in five to 10 humans each year, along with horses, some birds and, infrequently, other mammals.

The responses of municipalities and schools are directed at limiting exposure to mosquitoes, which are most active at dusk and dawn.

There is no specific treatment for EEE. The disease is more effectively prevented by avoiding exposure to mosquitoes, wearing long-sleeved pants and shirts, using insect repellents and staying indoors, whenever possible, at dusk and at dawn.

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Portland Press Herald

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Posted: September 3
Updated: Today at 12:07 AM

Virus concern causes York High to change game times

The school's athletic director schedules earlier contests after positive tests for Eastern equine encephalitis.

By North Cairn ncairn@pressherald.com
Staff Writer

York High School is changing its sports schedules to start all outdoor home night games two hours earlier than usual to mitigate the threat of Eastern equine encephalitis.

Today's poll: York virus concerns

Do you agree with York High School's decision to cancel all night sports games after mosquitoes carrying the EEE virus were discovered at several area ponds?

- Yes
- No

Vote View Results

According to Athletic Director Ted Welch, the school's soccer and football schedule will be adjusted to minimize exposure of students and fans to the virus, which has been discovered in two mosquito test pools in town in the past month. Home games usually start at 6 p.m. but now will begin at 4 p.m., well before dusk, when disease-transmitting mosquitoes are likely to become more active and the possibility of being bitten increases.

The decision to move up the starting times of night games was made Monday after high school officials consulted with Superintendent Debra Dunn, as well as other district and municipal officials, Welch said. Some York Middle School events will also be rescheduled.

State officials first found the virus in mosquitoes collected in a pool in Alfred on July 16. The Maine Principals' Association and the state Department of Education issued a joint advisory on Aug. 22 to all member schools. It said that if additional infected mosquitoes were found, officials within affected districts were being advised by the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention to consider scheduling earlier starting times for night events, according to Mike Burnham, assistant executive director of the association. The second positive test for the virus in York was reported last Friday.

"We are taking precautionary steps," Dunn said. The district has already sprayed a pesticide along tree lines on the edges of all athletic fields and playgrounds.

The pesticide used was LESCO CrossCheck Plus Multi-Insecticide, a pyrethroid with the active

ingredient bifenthrin. It was applied by Municipal Pest Management Services of Portsmouth, N.H., Dunn said. The pesticide, designed to kill several insects, also is listed as highly toxic to fish and other aquatic organisms.

The first contest affected by the earlier playing time is a girls' varsity soccer game, which is now set for 4 p.m. Friday. The change applies only to home games, Welch said.

This is the second time in district history that York schools have changed their athletic schedules to avoid holding events in the evening, he said.

"I don't want to be an alarmist," said Welch, emphasizing that no human cases of Eastern equine encephalitis have been reported anywhere in Maine this year. However, because of the second positive test from a mosquito pool last week on Bog Road, about two miles from the high school, officials felt it was prudent to adjust outdoor activity schedules.

"People being cautious is a good idea," said Burnham.

Because of the risk posed by the virus, he said people should take steps to protect themselves from being bitten by mosquitoes and use good sense about being outdoors at night. But it is not a cause for panic, he said.

Eastern equine encephalitis is a viral disease transmitted to humans by mosquitoes. The mosquitoes get infected by biting a bird that carries the disease. The virus can cause serious neurological damage or even death and is considered more serious than West Nile virus, which is also a mosquito-borne disease.

Many people infected with the virus, for which there is no specific treatment, exhibit no obvious symptoms, according to the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Infection is most effectively prevented by avoiding exposure to mosquitoes, particularly between dusk and dawn. State health officials also recommend that those heading outdoors in the evening wear long-sleeved shirts and full-length pants and use insect repellent.

Eastern equine encephalitis has never been reported in a Maine resident, according to the Maine CDC. However, the July 16 collection in Alfred that yielded the first positive test was the earliest in the season on record. In 2008, a fatal case of the disease was diagnosed in a Massachusetts resident who may have been infected while vacationing in Maine's Cumberland County.

The virus was found in a flock of pheasants in Lebanon in 2012, and the state experienced a spike in virus reports in 2009, when multiple animals and mosquito pools tested positive.

Mosquito pools in New Hampshire, Vermont and Massachusetts also have tested positive for the virus this year, and in the Bay State two horses also tested positive.

The risk ends when the first hard frost kills the mosquito population, usually between Oct. 1 and 15.

According to the National Weather Service, the average date of the first hard frost in York is Oct. 1, Welch said. If no frost has occurred by that date, the district will consider extending the rescheduling of home games, he said.

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Were you interviewed for this story? If so, please fill out our accuracy form

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http://www.pressherald.com/news/virus-concern-causes-change-to-game-times_2013-09-04.html

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ADDISON COUNTY INDEPENDENT
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State to combat EEE virus with aerial spraying in Whiting area

Posted on August 22, 2013 | Addison County eee Featured Whiting
By Lee J. Kahrs

WHITING — The state will perform two courses of aerial pesticide spraying in Whiting in the coming days in a pre-emptive strike to combat Eastern equine encephalitis.

Vermont Health Commissioner Dr. Harry Chen announced the move on Tuesday, saying that mosquito pools in Whiting are continuing to test positive for the EEE virus. The first positive tests were discovered Aug. 9. Since then, health officials have started testing twice a week and the news is not good.

In all, the virus has been identified five times in mosquito pools from the same area. West Nile virus has also been detected in mosquitoes collected in Whiting and in Brandon.

“This is the same area we detected EEE in mosquitos last year,” Chen said in a press release. “In light of this fact and our concern for human health, we have decided to undertake aerial spraying of this area.”

Chen said to be most effective, the state will need to do aerial spraying twice, three to seven days apart. Weather permitting, officials are planning to spray the pesticide Anvil 10+10 (known as Sumithrin) on Thursday, Aug. 22, and Tuesday, Aug. 27, between dusk and 11 p.m.

The pesticide will be sprayed in very low volume concentrations from a fixed-wing aircraft. In case of rain, the operation could be postponed.

The area to be treated is limited to a four-square-mile area centered around the swampy area north of Stickney Road called Bond Island. This area is sparsely populated. The Agency of Agriculture will manage the spraying operation. The state does not intend to spray the Brandon block that was sprayed last year, as there have been no positive EEE tests in mosquitoes in that area.

The move comes before any human cases of EEE have been detected this year. EEE made its debut in Vermont in July 2012 and resulted in two human cases, both fatal. Richard Breen, 87, of Brandon and Scott Sgorbati, 49, of Sudbury both contracted EEE last August and died.

In early September 2012, state health and agriculture officials made the decision to do an aerial spraying of pesticide over the Brandon and Whiting area to kill adult mosquitoes and reduce the risk to the public health. No other human cases of the virus have been reported since.

People who are infected with EEE can develop two types of illness. One has a sudden onset and is characterized by chills, fever, malaise and joint and muscle pain, and lasts about one to two weeks. The more severe illness affects the central nervous system and causes fever, headache, irritability, restlessness, drowsiness, convulsions and coma. Approximately one-third of people with severe EEE die from the disease.

The Vermont Department of Health is urging area residents to be vigilant in protecting themselves against mosquito bites with the presence of West Nile virus and EEE.

The Department of Health is urging people to protect themselves against mosquito bites by wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants outside when mosquitoes are active; using insect repellents that contain DEET, picaridin and oil of lemon eucalyptus; covering baby carriages or outdoor play spaces with mosquito netting; installing or repairing screens on windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out and reducing mosquito breeding habitats by getting rid of standing water and draining areas where water can pool, such as rain gutters, wading pools and old tires.

“These newest detections only intensify our recommendations to Vermonters to fight the bite, no matter where you live,” Chen said. “We can’t kill every mosquito, but targeted spraying may knock back the local population of mosquitoes that are carrying the EEE virus. Spraying could reduce risk of infection, but it’s still important that we all take precautions against mosquito bites.”

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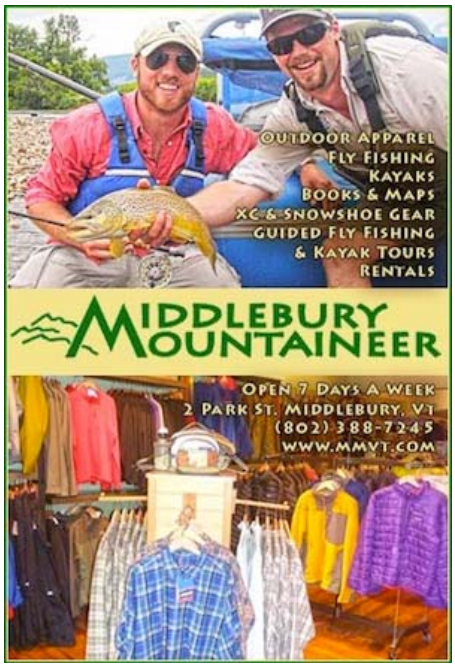
For extensive information about EEE virus and West Nile virus and mosquito pool and veterinary testing results, go to www.healthvermont.gov.



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Star-Telegram

Cost of West Nile outbreak in Texas exceeded $47 million for acute medical care, lost productivity

Posted Wednesday, Sep. 04, 2013

BY STEVE CAMPBELL
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The cost for acute medical care and lost productivity related to the Texas outbreak of West Nile virus in 2012 likely exceeded $47 million, according to a new study released Wednesday.

The state's 1,886 cases demonstrated the need for ongoing mosquito surveillance and the necessity of developing an effective vaccine, said Dr. Kristy Murray, who led the research conducted by the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

"When you look at what it is costing us as a society, it's enormous. Last year it was easily $47 million for just acute medical care, and that's a very, very conservative estimate," Murray said.

That figure doesn't include include the public health expense of mosquito control. Researchers noted that a recent study showed that the cost of aerial spraying in Dallas County alone exceeded $1.6 million.

Longer-term medical costs are likely to be substantial because some of those affected will need continuing rehabilitation and may be disabled, as well as the possible risk of chronic kidney disease, Murray said.

Researchers also observed a three-year pattern of increases in reported human cases in Texas.

"We may be going into a cycle where we see an even larger outbreak every 10 years," Murray said.

The 2012 outbreak in Texas was more than two times the previous high, which occurred in 2003 with 735 cases, she said.

When comparing 2012 cases with the previous 10 years of data, researchers found no difference in the severity of the disease with regard to age.

Researchers did find that older adults, minorities, and males were at highest risk for developing the severe form of the disease, which happens when the virus invades the nervous system.

Texas at epicenter

In 2012, Texas was the epicenter of the largest West Nile outbreak in U.S. history with 1,868 cases reported and 89 deaths, according to the Texas Department of State Health Services. Nationally, there were a record 5,387 cases and 243 deaths in 2012, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Of the 254 counties in Texas, 135 reported at least one West Nile case, and the overall incidence rate for the state was 7.8 cases per 100,000 population, the study said.

Nearly half of the cases (48 percent) were reported in North Texas counties: 259 in Tarrant (14 percent), 396 in Dallas (21 percent), 183 in Denton (10 percent) and 64 in Collin (3 percent), according to the study. Those four counties had a combined incidence rate of 16 cases per 100,000 population.

The outbreak peaked in mid-August with 225 reported cases, which is historically the time all prior outbreaks of West Nile in Texas from 2002 to 2011 peaked, the study said.

Tarrant County response

In response to the 2012 outbreak, Tarrant County expects to spend an additional $500,000 over two years to combat the virus, according to County Administrator G.K. Manius.

This year, the county started its mosquito surveillance program a month earlier than in the past and added 150 fixed-location mosquito traps. Another 50 mobile traps were utilized to respond to field operations and citizen complaints, said Dr. Anita Kurian, associate director for the Tarrant County Health Department.

In 2012, county health officials relied on 30 to 50 mobile trapping units.

“The difference this year is that it’s pretty systematic sampling. In the past, traps were haphazardly placed and haphazardly sampled. It’s important to check the traps week after week to give us an idea of what exactly is happening,” Kurian said.

“The data we are collecting [are] more valid and more reliable. We can identify hot spots and that enables us to focus our prevention efforts.”

This year, the county has recorded 21 positive mosquito samples compared with 84 in 2012, she said. There have been only two human West Nile cases in Tarrant County, one in Fort Worth and one in Keller.

In the meantime, additional work needs to be done to develop predictive models for West Nile virus, Murray said, noting that the 2011 drought and the mild winter of 2012 may have contributed to the outbreak.

“This shows us how unpredictable West Nile can be, and how we always need to remain vigilant in looking for it, especially early on in the season so that it can be prevented,” Murray said.

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Spread of Crop Pests Threatens Global Food Security as Earth Warms

Sep. 1, 2013 — A new study has revealed that global warming is resulting in the spread of crop pests towards the North and South Poles at a rate of nearly 3 kilometers a year.

The study, published in the journal *Nature Climate Change* and carried out by researchers at the University of Exeter and the University of Oxford, shows a strong relationship between increased global temperatures over the past 50 years and expansion in the range of crop pests.

Mountain pine beetle attack. Warming generally stimulates insect herbivory at higher latitudes as seen in outbreaks of the Mountain pine beetle (Dendroctonus ponderosae) that has destroyed large areas of pine forest in the US Pacific Northwest. (Credit: © TreePhoto / Fotolia)

Currently 10-16% of global crop production is lost to pests. Crop pests include fungi, bacteria, viruses, insects, nematodes, viroids and oomycetes. The diversity of crop pests continues to expand and new strains are continually evolving. Losses of major crops to fungi, and fungi-like microorganisms, amount to enough to feed nearly nine percent of today's global population. The study suggests that these figures will increase further if global temperatures continue to rise as predicted.

The spread of pests is caused by both human activities and natural processes but is thought to be primarily the result of international freight transportation. The study suggests that the warming climate is allowing pests to become established in previously unsuitable regions. For example, warming generally stimulates insect herbivory at higher latitudes as seen in outbreaks of the Mountain pine beetle *(Dendroctonus ponderosae*) that has destroyed large areas of pine forest in the US Pacific Northwest. In addition, the rice blast fungus which is present in over 80 countries, and has a dramatic effect both on the agricultural economy and ecosystem health, has now moved to wheat. Considered a new disease, wheat blast is sharply reducing wheat yields in Brazil.

Dr Dan Bebber from the University of Exeter said: "If crop pests continue to march polewards as Earth warms the combined effects of a growing world population and the increased loss of crops to pests will pose a serious threat to global food security."

Professor Sarah Gurr from the University of Exeter (previously at the University of Oxford) said: "Renewed efforts are required to monitor the spread of crop pests and to control their movement from region to region if we are to halt the relentless destruction of crops across the world in the face of climate change."

The study used published observations of the distribution of 612 crop pests collected over the past 50 years. It revealed that the movement of pests north and south towards the poles, and into new previously un-colonised regions, corresponds to increased temperatures during that period.

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Story Source:

The above story is based on materials provided by **University of Exeter**.

Note: Materials may be edited for content and length. For further information, please contact the source cited above.

Journal Reference:

1. Daniel P. Bebber, Mark A. T. Ramotowski, Sarah J. Gurr. **Crop pests and pathogens move polewards in a warming world**. *Nature Climate Change*, 2013; DOI: 10.1038/nclimate1990

SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN™

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See Inside

Labels for GMO Foods Are a Bad Idea

Mandatory labels for genetically modified foods are a bad idea

By The Editors | Friday, September 6, 2013 | 87 comments

This past June, Connecticut and Maine became the first states to pass bills requiring labels on all foods made from genetically modified organisms (GMOs). In November 2012 California voters rejected the similar Proposition 37 by a narrow majority of 51.4 percent. “All we want is a simple label/For the food that's on our table,” chanted marchers before the elections. The issue, however, is in no way simple.

Image: Doug Chayka

We have been tinkering with our food's DNA since the dawn of agriculture. By selectively breeding plants and animals with the most desirable traits, our predecessors transformed organisms' genomes, turning a scraggly grass into plump-kerneled corn, for example. For the past 20 years Americans have been eating plants in which scientists have used modern tools to insert a gene here or tweak a gene there, helping the crops tolerate drought and resist herbicides. Around 70 percent of processed foods in the U.S. contain genetically modified ingredients.

Instead of providing people with useful information, mandatory GMO labels would only intensify the misconception that so-called Frankenfoods endanger people's health [see “The Truth about Genetically Modified Food”]. The American Association for the Advancement of Science, the World Health Organization and the exceptionally vigilant European Union agree that GMOs are just as safe as other foods. Compared with conventional breeding techniques—which swap giant chunks of DNA between one plant and another—genetic engineering is far more precise and, in most cases, is less likely to produce an unexpected result. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has tested all the GMOs on the market to determine whether they are toxic or allergenic. They are not. (The GMO-fearing can seek out “100 Percent Organic” products, indicating that a food contains no genetically modified ingredients, among other requirements.)

Many people argue for GMO labels in the name of increased consumer choice. On the contrary, such labels have limited people's options. In 1997, a time of growing opposition to GMOs in Europe, the E.U. began to require them. By 1999, to avoid labels that might drive customers away, most major European retailers had removed genetically modified ingredients from products bearing their brand. Major food producers such as Nestlé followed suit. Today it is virtually impossible to find GMOs in European supermarkets.

Americans who oppose genetically modified foods would celebrate a similar exclusion. Everyone else would pay a price. Because conventional crops often require more water and pesticides than GMOs do, the former are usually more expensive. Consequently, we would all have to pay a premium on non-GMO foods—and for a questionable return. Private research firm Northbridge Environmental Management Consultants estimated that Prop 37 would have raised an average California family's yearly food bill by as much as $400. The measure would also have required farmers, manufacturers and retailers to keep a whole new set of detailed records and to prepare

for lawsuits challenging the “naturalness” of their products.

Antagonism toward GMO foods also strengthens the stigma against a technology that has delivered enormous benefits to people in developing countries and promises far more. Recently published data from a seven-year study of Indian farmers show that those growing a genetically modified crop increased their yield per acre by 24 percent and boosted profits by 50 percent. These farmers were able to buy more food—and food of greater nutritional value—for their families.

To curb vitamin A deficiency—which blinds as many as 500,000 children worldwide every year and kills half of them—researchers have engineered Golden Rice, which produces beta-carotene, a precursor of vitamin A. Approximately three quarters of a cup of Golden Rice provides the recommended daily amount of vitamin A; several tests have concluded that the product is safe. Yet Greenpeace and other anti-GMO organizations have used misinformation and hysteria to delay the introduction of Golden Rice to the Philippines, India and China.

More such products are in the works, but only with public support and funding will they make their way to people's plates. An international team of researchers has engineered a variety of cassava—a staple food for 600 million people—with 30 times the usual amount of beta-carotene and four times as much iron, as well as higher levels of protein and zinc. Another group of scientists has created corn with 169-fold the typical amount of beta-carotene, six times as much vitamin C and double the folate.

At press time, GMO-label legislation is pending in at least 20 states. Such debates are about so much more than slapping ostensibly simple labels on our food to satisfy a segment of American consumers. Ultimately, we are deciding whether we will continue to develop an immensely beneficial technology or shun it based on unfounded fears.

DAILY NEWS

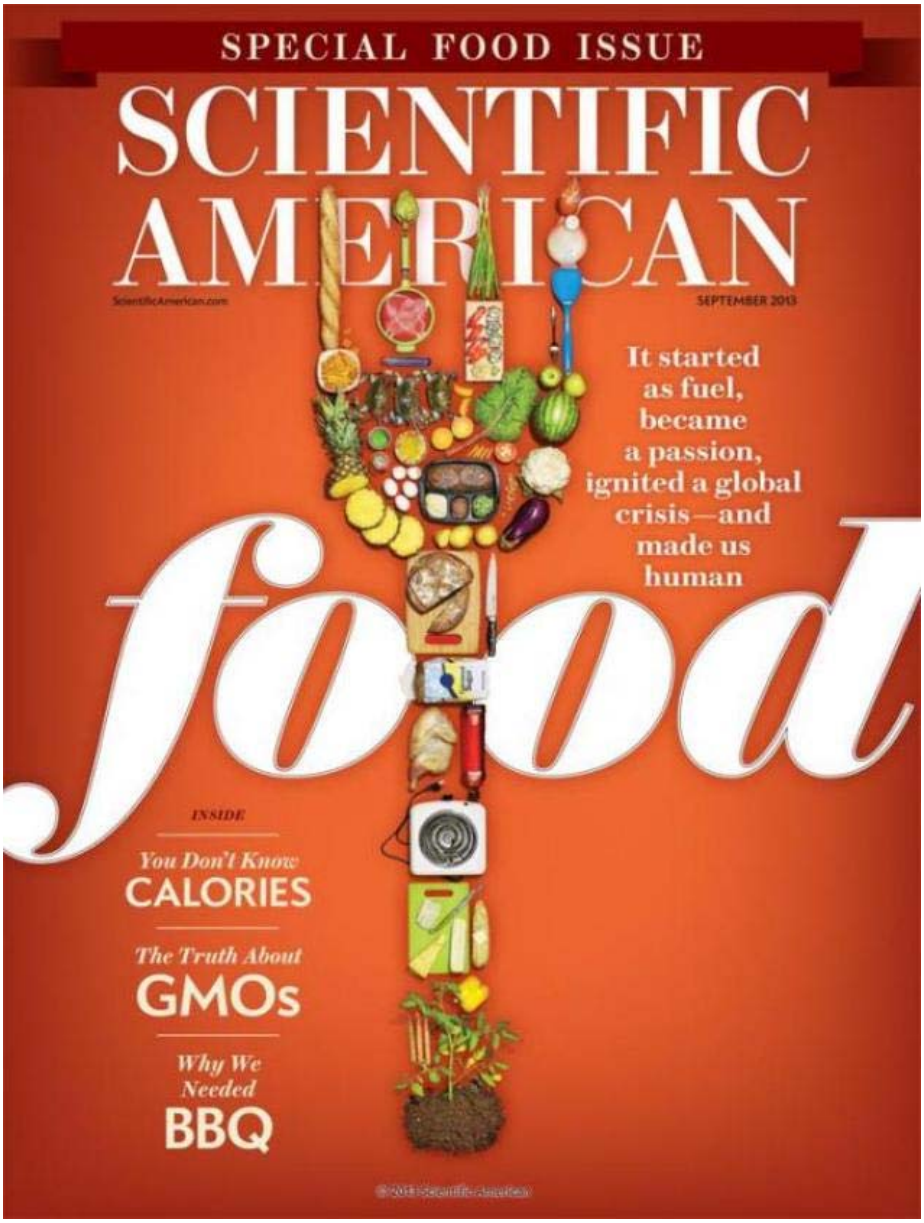
US.

GMO foes blast Scientific American editorial decrying labeling laws

An editorial against proposed laws requiring labels for GMO foods in the Sept. 6 issue of Scientific American is being criticized as "unscientific."

BY DAVID KNOWLES / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2013, 8:05 PM



SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN MAGAZINE

The editors of Scientific American wrote a strongly worded rebuke of GMO labeling laws in its most recent issue.

In the growing battle over GMO foods, science is being used as a weapon.

GMO labeling activists are decrying an editorial in Scientific American that takes aim at labeling laws for genetically engineered foods as “unscientific.”

In its Sept. 6 issue, the editors of Scientific American came out against the labeling laws that are currently

being considered in 20 U.S. states, and have recently been passed by the legislatures of Connecticut and Maine, because they would give consumers the false impression that GMO's are unsafe.

"The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has tested all the GMOs on the market to determine whether they are toxic or allergenic," the editorial states. "They are not."

Stacy Malkan, the former director for Yes on 37, the campaign to pass California's failed ballot initiative to mandate foods containing GMO ingredients, scoffs at that claim.

"The editorial is sloppy and unscientific," Malkan told the Daily News. "Saying the FDA has tested all the GMOs on the market is patently false. Each individual company is responsible for testing its own products, and they then decide if they want to voluntarily report it to FDA. But they aren't required to test or report."

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A second contested point in the editorial is the contention that requiring labeling of GMO ingredients will result in higher food prices because genetically engineered seeds can produce higher yields and require less pesticide.

"Private research firm Northbridge Environmental Management Consultants estimated that Prop 37 would have raised an average California family's yearly food bill by as much as $400," the editorial states.

Malkan calls the study, which was conducted during the heated debate over Proposition 37, "useless," and notes that it became an industry rallying cry despite being overturned by later studies conducted by the University of California at Davis.

ROBYN BECK/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

GMO labeling activists are firing back at the magazine, citing what they say are numerous factual inacuracies.

"Let's get the facts straight," Malkan said. "Scientific American got seduced into using this bogus report."

Stacie Orell, the campaign director for GMO Free N.Y., a group pushing to pass a bill in the New York Legislature to mandate labels for genetically engineered foods, felt a similar sense of disbelief when reading the editorial.

Specifically, she noted the inclusion of a passage about the benefits of golden rice, a GMO crop that targets vitamin A deficiency that often leads to blindness in the developing world.

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"While I'm not against the idea of golden rice, its benefits in practice remain unkonwn," Orell said. "These are theoretical ideas that the bio-tech industry often uses to green-wash the issue."

Public health lawyer Michele Simon agrees that the Scientific American piece had a familiar ring to it.

“It reads like the biotech industry handed Scientific American its talking points,” Simon said in an email.

One of the main claims in the editorial does mirror ones made by GMO seed producer Monsanto—that requiring labels could potentially kill the market for genetically engineered foods in a country where 70% of processed foods already contain them, resulting in less variety and higher costs.

“Many people argue for GMO labels in the name of increased consumer choice,” the editorial states. “On the contrary, such labels have limited people's options. In 1997, a time of growing opposition to GMOs in Europe, the E.U. began to require them. By 1999, to avoid labels that might drive customers away, most major European retailers had removed genetically modified ingredients from products bearing their brand. Major food producers such as Nestlé followed suit. Today it is virtually impossible to find GMOs in European supermarkets.”

To Simon’s ears, assuming the same result in the U.S. is just one more faulty conclusion.

“The European experience would not translate the same way here,” Simon said. “Americans don't reject GMOs, all this would change is labels.”

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National Stakeholder Team Creates Initiative to Strengthen U.S. Pesticide Safety Education

The Weed Science Society of America today announced that the National Stakeholder Team for Pesticide Safety Education Program Funding has created a three-year initiative to enhance the education of pesticide applicators.

Lawrence, KS (PRWEB) September 03, 2013 -- The Weed Science Society of America today announced that the National Stakeholder Team for Pesticide Safety Education Program Funding has created a three-year initiative to enhance the education of pesticide applicators.

The U.S. Pesticide Safety Education Program (PSEP) has faced a variety of funding challenges in recent years, which resulted in the formation of the National Stakeholder Team last fall. WSSA is a member of this diverse team, which includes representatives from government, extension, industry, professional societies and universities.

“The Team continues to evaluate a broad range of options for strengthening PSEPs throughout the United States,” notes Charles Moses, Co-Lead of the National Stakeholder Team, representing the Association of American Pesticide Control Officials. “This initiative is one important product of the Team’s work and is now being implemented by a separate Board.”

Goals of the initiative include:

- Establishing a national website for training materials
- Creating more online distance education classes
- Compiling, updating and producing training materials for the national website
- Focusing appropriate time on pesticide safety in certification and re-certification classes
- Increasing collaborative efforts among states to fill training material gaps
- Pursuing additional direct and indirect sustainable support for PSEPs at the state level

Initial funding for the initiative has been provided by BASF Corporation, Bayer CropScience, Dow AgroSciences, DuPont Crop Protection and Syngenta, and will be distributed by CropLife Foundation at the direction of the Board.

The Board currently includes representatives from the American Association of Pesticide Safety Educators, the Association of American Pesticide Control Officials, the Association of Structural Pest Control Regulatory Officials, the Cooperative Extension Service, CropLife America, Dow AgroSciences, DuPont Crop Protection, Syngenta, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Pest Management Policy and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

“The National Stakeholder Team, state regulatory agencies, university administrations and others will also have key support roles, where appropriate, to assist PSEPs in meeting the goals of the initiative,” says Robert Magee, Board Co-Chair and Regional Stewardship Manager, North America, DuPont Crop Protection. “Strong Pesticide Safety Education Programs throughout the U.S. benefit us all.”

About the Weed Science Society of America

The Weed Science Society of America, a nonprofit scientific society, was founded in 1956 to encourage and promote the development of knowledge concerning weeds and their impact on the environment. The Weed Science Society of America promotes research, education and extension outreach activities related to weeds, provides science-based information to the public and policy makers, fosters awareness of weeds and their impact on managed and natural ecosystems, and promotes cooperation among weed science organizations across the nation and around the world. For more information, visit www.wssa.net

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