

6/17/2009

Norfolk County Mosquito Control Project (NCMCP)

By Katie Poirier
Boston University Student
School of Public Health

As a Public Health student interested in fighting global infectious disease, it was surprisingly natural to find myself traipsing through the back woods of Walpole, Massachusetts on a hunt for mosquito larvae, “dipper” in hand. Recently I spent a day with the Norfolk County Mosquito Control Project (NCMCP), learning about their complex system to protect 25 towns in this county from mosquitoes and the diseases they can spread. I was surprised to see the amount of time and energy that is placed on mosquito control, and I was also able to learn about why it is so important. Although sometimes unnoticed, the system of mosquito control in place by the NCMCP is incredibly important to these communities.

During my visit, the staff of NCMCP was friendly, incredibly knowledgeable, and immediately invested in educating me about their processes. As he was teaching me how to make a trap, the Director of the NCMCP, John Smith, swatted at a mosquito buzzing by his ear, caught it between his hands and after a quick glance announced confidently: “pipiens.” Although some might not appreciate this skill, it is important to know what species of mosquitoes inhabit certain towns, in order to track diseases that are commonly carried in those species. West Nile Virus and Eastern Equine Encephalitis are both viruses carried by mosquitoes that affect humans.

NCMCP participates in many activities to protect the public from diseases carried by mosquitoes. These activities include making traps, collecting and identifying samples of mosquitoes from all over Norfolk County, careful surveillance of breeding grounds such as wetlands, the application of larvicides and adulticides to reduce mosquito populations in these breeding grounds, and education on the proper use of personal protection measures. Other activities include Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping of Norfolk County, and cleaning ditches and pipes. Cleaning sites where stagnant water is creating a breeding ground for mosquitoes is a major function of the NCMCP, which is critical to reducing mosquito populations.

Although the NCMCP is working to control mosquito numbers, it is imperative that individuals practice personal protection as well. There are simple measures that can be taken to avoid mosquito bites, which are important to preventing disease and protecting your health. Some examples are: wearing repellent with DEET, wearing long sleeved shirts and long pants, avoid being outside between dusk and

dawn when mosquito activity is highest, using screens on windows and doors, and not allowing water to accumulate outside in bird baths, old tires, and other receptacles. For more information about how to protect oneself from mosquitoes, visit the NCMCP website at <http://www.massnrc.org/ncmcp/>.

With the dedicated efforts of the staff at the NCMCP, along with support of the Norfolk County community, mosquito populations can be kept at bay. The NCMCP works hard year round to ensure that the county is protected, and their efforts should not go unnoticed.