



# Press Release

MOSQUITO and VECTOR MANAGEMENT DISTRICT  
of SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

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## LOCAL MOSQUITO CONTROL AGENCY BUSY WITH STAGNANT SWIMMING POOLS IN TEA FIRE AREA

The Tea Fire in November 2008, which destroyed or damaged hundreds of homes in the communities of Santa Barbara and Montecito, has created a public health danger for the affected area. Many of the homes impacted by the fire have swimming pools, hot tubs, ornamental water gardens, or other water bodies that have turned into stagnant breeding grounds for mosquitoes. A single stagnant swimming pool can produce millions of mosquitoes that present a risk for West Nile Virus transmission as well as a nuisance for people still living or working in the neighborhood. In warm weather, mosquitoes can grow from egg to adult in as little as 10 days.

In response, Mosquito and Vector Management Technicians have been inspecting all affected properties within the Tea Fire burn area for disabled swimming pools and other possible mosquito breeding sources. To date, 168 properties have been inspected, 28 of which have been found to have potential mosquito breeding sources and have been treated.

Two techniques are utilized to treat large stagnant water sources. The preferred method is to plant Mosquito Fish (*Gambusia affinis*) which will eat the mosquito larvae. These fish represent a non-invasive, environmentally conscious and sustainable means of mosquito control which eliminates or drastically reduces the need for chemical pesticides. The fish reproduce rapidly and remain on duty 24/7 to prevent mosquito breeding while reducing the need for repeated inspections and pesticide applications. The second technique involves the application of Altosid, a low toxicity, target specific pesticide, which prevents the mosquito larvae from maturing into flying adults. A time release formulation of this material can prevent adult mosquito emergence for up to 150 days. Small mosquito breeding sources such as buckets and flower pots are

emptied and turned upside down or stored in a manner that prevents them from re-filling with rain water.

The Mosquito and Vector Management District of Santa Barbara County invites residents to contact them if they identify or suspect a breeding source. Technicians will be dispatched to inspect and if necessary treat the source at no cost. The District does request that citizens, homeowners and other good Samaritans refrain from adding bleach or other chemicals into water bodies that contain fish. Not only are these chemicals harmful to our environment, but they are also ineffective at killing mosquito larvae. However, they will readily kill Mosquito Fish; thereby returning the pool to a mosquito breeding source within days. In addition, the District would advise against pumping a stagnant swimming pool dry until it is ready to be put back into service. Without the weight of the water in the pool, ground water can push the pool out of the ground and cause it to be ruined, resulting in fire victims suffering further damage to their property.

There are a number of general precautions that all residents of Santa Barbara County can take to protect themselves from mosquito bites and help to eliminate mosquito breeding around their homes. These include:

- Avoid outdoor activity when mosquitoes are most active – from dusk until dawn.
- If outdoors, wear protective clothing and apply mosquito repellants according to label directions – those containing DEET, Picaridin, or Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus have been proven to be the most effective.
- Ensure that door and window screens are secured and in good repair to prevent mosquito entrance into homes.
- Eliminate standing and stagnant water. Eggs are laid and immature mosquitoes develop in dirty pools & spas, ponds, bird baths, buckets, barrels, children's toys etc. Immature mosquitoes become biting adults in 5-7 days.
- Free mosquito-eating fish are available to residents of the District's service area for permanent water sources (ponds, animal watering troughs, large fountains) at the Mosquito and Vector Management District of Santa Barbara County Office.
- Horse owners should contact their veterinarian to have their horses vaccinated for West Nile Virus and to keep the vaccinations up to date.
- Contact the Mosquito and Vector Management District of Santa Barbara County immediately at (805) 969-5050 to report mosquito problems or green pools/spas.

Additional information and requests for service can be obtained from the Mosquito and Vector Management District of Santa Barbara County at [www.mvmdistrict.org](http://www.mvmdistrict.org) or **(805) 969-5050**. The Mosquito and Vector Management District welcomes all reports of standing water and possible mosquito breeding sources within its service areas throughout Santa Barbara County.