



It's Mosquito Control Awareness Week again, already? Did you spray repellent in celebration? No, it is not the kind of situation that gets us to conjuring up celebrations; is it? Well, not for most of us, anyway. There are some who celebrate, though. There are the people who have survived the gruesome diseases spread by mosquitoes; namely Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) and West Nile virus (WNV) on this eastern side of the USA. Even out of that group, though, most "survivors", especially of EEE, end up in a nursing home with severe neurological damage. Not much of a survival, is it? With that in mind, we are down to a few miracles in the whole country, where individuals survived with little residual damage. Those few truly celebrate their life that had such a close brush with death.

The rest of us search for things to be thankful for. I am thankful that in Massachusetts, we have a Department of Public Health (MA DPH) who cared enough to gather experts from around the world to examine climate change, discuss pesticides and share knowledge of mosquitoes and the details of their habits. And, boy, are there ever so many details! Did you know that a so-called bird biting mosquito will bite whatever is handy if it needs that blood meal? Contemporary methods of DNA analysis can now identify the contents of a mosquito's stomach! Did you know that the mosquito most responsible for the strengthening or amplification of EEE is the bird-biter *Culiseta melanura*? They live in the swamps and it is very challenging to reduce the population of these little blood sucking creatures because of their egg laying habits. The female *Culiseta melanura* enters small holes at the base of swamp trees, such as cedars, and lays her eggs in the protective covering of little crypts under the tree roots. There they grow into larvae, protected from the environmentally safe BTi larvicides dropped by our Mosquito Control Programs and later emerge, unharmed, as adults. That is just one of many reasons why preventing EEE through mosquito control alone is so very challenging.

Months of discussions and debates and analyses of past results and possible trends took place with that expert panel gathered by DPH in order to decide, based on science, if there was any way at all to improve our response to the threat of diseases spread by mosquitoes. I admire and applaud that scientific approach and effort employed by MA DPH this past winter. That process of examination fits the description of one of my favorite quotes. Shoshana Zuboff,

retired Harvard professor, said, “then old categories of experience are called into question and revised.”

While MA DPH did modify its response plan for mosquito borne diseases, I am also and mostly reminded of the first half of the same quote: “Awareness requires a rupture with the old world we take for granted; then old categories of experience are called into question and revised.”

That rupturing or consciously breaking away from former ways that we’ve grown accustomed to and take for granted is exactly what we have to experience in order to truly be aware of mosquito control. We have taken for granted that there must a chemical for that. We have taken for granted that our taxes pay for these services and we take for granted that the services should and will be as effective as we want them to be. We take for granted that scientists must know all about mosquitoes by now! Unless your life has been touched by the tragedy of mosquito borne disease, you might think they are just a nuisance and you just might take for granted it won’t happen to you.

After much reading and listening and even though I understand that learning is a lifelong process, it is still amazing for me to have to realize and admit that we, as individuals, are the most powerful force in the battle against mosquitoes. When we actually apply the advice of avoiding dusk to dawn activities, wearing insect repellent (oil of lemon eucalyptus has proven to be as effective as DEET) and dressing for protection with long sleeves and pants, keeping screens repaired and eliminating standing water, we have done so much to protect ourselves! We could multiply that effect if everyone became aware of the importance of personal protection measures.

Are you ready to protect yourself and your loved ones? Maybe someday we will have that scientific breakthrough allowing mosquitoes to remain as part of the food chain and continue being plant pollinators but unable to carry the diseases they do now because of a new idea. Maybe the new idea pays attention to the birds, in whose blood the EEE and WNV grows. Maybe we’ll vaccinate birds some day. In the meantime, be aware and protect yourself!

*Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for Halifax, MA.* For more information to help you be aware of mosquitoes, see Plymouth County Mosquito Control at <http://plymouthmosquito.org/> You can also call PCMC at: (781) 585-5450 (8:00am - 3:00pm) or fax: (781) 582-1276

Also look at DPH’s information at <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/provider/guidelines-resources/clinical-treatment/diseases-conditions/communicable-diseases/public-health-cdc-arbovirus-info.html>

For a weekly update on mosquito data, see DPH’s page at <http://westnile.ashtonweb.com/summaries.asp>