

## Mid-summer Summary 8-1-08

It's summertime and life can seem like a roller coaster ride, which is fun if you are looking for thrills. However, if you are just trying to respond to and deal with life as it arrives, the reactions to your actions can seem confounding. If you are a local board of health and you want to not only deal with life as it is presented, but also plan for the future and prevent problems, well, be prepared for something else. Be prepared for those perplexing reactions, in addition to responses.

While some people respond with questions and are eager to learn what is happening and what led to current decisions, others react. Maybe there are a lot of zebras out there, if Paul Simon is correct. Or maybe I just don't see what is headed my way.

It was a not a surprise that local residents would be surprised and full of questions about closing beaches due to high algae counts and the discovery that our local fresh water ponds could have algae known to produce toxins. I did not receive one single negative call from residents on this emerging issue. People calling with questions and concerns seemed relieved to know that the appropriate measures were being taken. When the algae information was forwarded to health agents all over the South Shore, they expressed gratitude for the "heads up".

The recent surprise was the media's reactions to Halifax's adoption of a mosquito abatement regulation aimed at reducing breeding areas for mosquito species known to spread West Nile virus. You see, and hopefully, you know, the species carrying West Nile virus prefer to lay their eggs in containers of standing water, while the mosquito species carrying EEE tend to breed in large swampy bodies of water. That is why EEE is the country mosquito and Wnv is the city mosquito. Look for them soon at your favorite children's bookstore.

Or, you can maintain all those containers in your yard by emptying out buckets and toys, flushing out birdbaths and kiddie pools at least every four days, cleaning your gutters so that water can flow and getting rid of water-holding items such as tarps and trash bags. And then there are the dumpsters. *Culex pipiens*, those WNV carrying mosquitoes, love those dumpsters. They hold water and grime, considered as "nutrient rich" by WNV spreading critters.

The model for Halifax's mosquito abatement regulation was found online as used in New Mexico. It was a couple years ago that I shared it with other health agents. Although it was met with gratitude by other boards of health, I was busy with other projects and it was not until recently that I once again reviewed it and presented it to my board for consideration. I thought I was behind and late! Little did I know that others had also been busy and just had not gotten around to reviewing and adopting this regulation.

West Nile virus was suddenly so interesting last week, that Channel 25 called me at home on Saturday morning asking if they come to my home interview me on this topic. On Monday, Channel 5 asked if they could interview me regarding Halifax's recent adoption of standing water, mosquito abatement regulations. I wondered why were they so interested. The answer was found in the fact that the Globe recently published a story on Halifax's new regulation. That newspaper article mentioned that Halifax's regulation

might be the first of its kind in Massachusetts. Wow! Who knew that being proactive was so provocative? And the news channels? Such copy cats!

Here's my take on West Nile virus verses Eastern Equine Encephalitis: EEE is scarier because it kills children. Research backs this up. WNV "only" kills the elderly. It is not that we, as a society, do not care about the elderly but we respond, as humans, to anything threatening our children. Perhaps we are hard wired to do so. Although that makes sense, I want people to pay attention to life saving measures for all. Being over 55 years old, "all" includes me as an age threatened by WNV. What I wouldn't give to have my parents alive, who died from congestive heart failure and a rare autoimmune disease. Why risk a life just because of a mosquito bite? Especially one that we can prevent!

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