

9-20-13 The Pesticide Codes

There are codes of conduct, even during a pedicure, and there are codes of law; sometimes they overlap.

There I was, ready for a pedicure, when I discovered from the woman next to me, that her husband had recently suffered from a serious case of Lyme disease. She was convinced that “spraying was needed”.

I had to tell her that spraying for ticks from the air, such as that for mosquitoes in times of emergency wouldn't work for ticks. Ticks are under the leaves on hot days and are out day and night (and year round, anytime it is above freezing). Our Mosquito Control Programs spray from trucks into the air for mosquitoes. That is not effective for ticks. Even when people hire pest control companies for their own yard, those people have to know how to spray vigorously under the leaves and into the low growing plants; a spray of the yard into the air is a waste of your money and places pesticides into the environment without a purpose; that isn't helping anything. Besides the environmental factors, there is also the fact that mice and deer are very prevalent and they are part of the disease cycle. It is not just the ticks.

Now she was listening but worried, too. So, I told her about the use of permethrin on clothing, how it was developed decades ago for malaria ridden areas and is still used today as a critical step in preventing deadly malaria on such items as netting and tents. You can even buy clothing permeated with permethrin, which can take numerous cold water washes. But why buy it when you can make it? Socks, pants, shoes, gloves; they can all be sprayed outdoors (or buy liquid online and soak these items in a bag) and then allowed to dry, to keep the pesticide off your skin. The best socks for walks in the woods are white men's tube socks, with the toe seam cut off, sprayed (a can of Raid™ will do), and allowed to dry. You can buy the liquid kits, such as Sawyer, online

My pedicure neighbor with the husband with Lyme disease says, “Really? That's a good idea. Hmm... I'll tell my husband.” She returned to talking about restaurants and musicals. The conversational space had changed, once again. That's the Pedicure Code: be responsive and respectful.

I went back to “my space” and enjoyed the rest of the pedicure. I enjoyed learning that “my” young woman was going to school to be an occupational therapist. And she was beginning at a community college, even though she wanted to attend Boston University. I applauded both of her choices.

Even though I re-entered my personal space for the pedicure, as the public health forum had closed, I continued to think about the topic.

If the use of pesticides is not in your belief system, even the use of untreated tube socks, pulled all the way to your knees will help you to see the ticks. When you get home, check for ticks and put jackets, hats and clothing into the dryer, as heat will kill ticks but a wash won't.

How we conduct ourselves does make a difference, and applies to both the Pedicure Codes and the Pesticide Codes. It is currently legal to hire a pesticide applicator for bed bugs, ants, cockroaches, ticks; you name it. Make sure the person is a licensed pesticide applicator. It is also a best management practice if they understand Integrated Pest Management (IPM). That means the person understands that prevention is the best practice rather than kill the bug and be gone. People can claim they understand the principal but there is currently no certification for IPM, as there is for pesticide application.

There are real concerns with pesticides. That is why we have the Child Protection Act governing the use of pesticides in and around schools, requiring notification to parents.

Whether it be for personal use, as with my treated "tick socks", or hiring a licensed pesticide applicator or requesting spraying for mosquitoes from your County Mosquito Control Program, there are choices to be made. The best choice of all is to follow the Code of Personal Conduct. That code says you will do your best to prevent the problem and avoid the encounter (with the insect).

For Lyme disease, it can make a difference to make your yard less friendly to mice and deer, but that can be challenging, also, depending on where you live. Avoiding the encounter (as preached by Dr. Mather of the University of Rhode Island) could mean staying indoors or, it could mean wearing geeky tick socks treated with permethrin, like Cathy Drinan, looking something like Scrooge McDuck in his spats. A less geeky option is to treat your "regular" socks pants, shoes, with permethrin.

Remember to conduct the tick check and put hats and jackets into the clothes drier when you get home from that hike. The goal is to enjoy nature and prevent the bite. That goal is our Code of Personal Conduct.

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