

2010: Oh, No; Not Again

The year began with public health departments still reeling from the H1N1 influenza pandemic and dealing with inaccurate information from all sides. Many people over sixty years old thought they had complete immunity from the various influenzas having crossing their paths and, so, mistakenly thought they did not need the vaccine. At the same time, others were feeling anxious to get it and relieved that there was finally enough for everyone. It was too little too late, however for the 17,000 people CDC estimates died from the disease and 57 million who became ill with it and 257,000 cases resulting in hospitalizations. It was frustrating for health departments who had the vaccine and could not convince people to get vaccinated because by the beginning of 2010, many viewed the illness as mild and “not even as bad as the regular seasonal flu”. Try telling that to the families who lost a loved one. I am grateful it wasn’t worse and hope that next time around, we can be better prepared and have sufficient vaccine for all. I for one am not complaining about how “mild” H1N1 was.

February 2010 brought a new challenge to many health agents: water shutoffs for nonpayment. The challenge was deciding how long the family could stay in house without water and that decision depended on what the family’s response was to the circumstances. So, as is so often the case, a meeting and a conversation was needed, with each case being individual and unique. I feel fortunate that each case resulted in resolution of some kind and no one needed to be told to leave the house because of lack of water.

While February had not enough water for some, March had more than enough for everybody. It fell from the sky. It filled the cellars. It filled the ditches. It flooded the yards and FEMA (Federal Emergency Management) responded to the disaster. I know some people who could have and should have benefited from FEMA and I also know of some pretty interesting stories where people tricked FEMA with double dipping for rental properties in addition to their primary residence. Oh well, we can't make all people follow the rules. That's okay; when there isn't a health agent, there's karma.

When in April, I began my reminders of ways to prevent mosquitoes from breeding in your yard and safe ways to respond to them, little did I know what that summer held in store for us and the mosquitoes. Extremely hot temperatures and drought but just enough rain to allow the mosquitoes to breed would lead to enough positive findings of Eastern Equine Encephalitis, that aerial spraying was conducted. Aerial spraying is always met with two basic responses: some of the people rejoice and some of the people mourn the use of pesticides. I prayed for no human cases.

The unwanted guest residing in so many ponds next to agricultural areas, cyanobacteria, otherwise known as blue-green algae, arrived earlier than usual with high counts in May. The West Monponsett pond was closed for most of the season, with advisories remaining well into the middle of December! The high algae counts result in more than health risk. The beach

closings and health advisories have a huge impact on the way of life for people living around the affected ponds. The very reason they wanted to live there becomes the same reason they consider leaving. I look forward to working with DEP and DPH and raising funds to allow treatment for the algae, so that once again the water can be enjoyed by all.

June brought my first major lead abatement case and it is still ongoing. Two families left rather than risk the health of their infants. The work continues and future poisonings will be prevented. That's a good thing. It's also the price of doing business when you are a landlord.

Entomologists came to my rescue many times last year. They told me what species of mosquitoes were carrying what kinds of disease and what their habits were. They taught me that bug bombs can be dangerous. They identified carpet beetles, larder beetles and head lice. I am oh, so thankful I have not had to ask them to identify a bed bug.

Many people were also bugged by much larger critters, with mice enjoying an especially bountiful year. While the mice munched on the bumper crop of acorns and pinecones, hawks falcons and even eagles enjoyed the prosperity.

Some people claimed to be bugged by nuisance issues, the sound of barking dogs for instance. Last year brought the biggest nuisance issue ever to my department. In fact it's a few hundred feet long and about 8 to 10 feet high. First it was a sound barrier. Then it was a compost pile. Then, the same structure was called a berm. The Board of Health has determined that no matter what you call it, it is not safe. Stay tuned, for the berm has not been put to bed yet.

Hello, 2011. We'll do the best we can.

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