San Gabriel Valley
Mosquito and Vector Control District

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Contact:
Jason Farned
Public Information Officer
Phone: (626) 814-9466
E-mail: jfarned@sgvmosquito.org

Over 1,700 Unmaintained and Empty Swimming Pools Concern Vector Control Agency

As of June 1st, 2015 the San Gabriel Valley Mosquito and Vector Control District (SGVMVCD) is monitoring over 1,700 swimming pools that are either empty or unmaintained in the 241 square miles that make up their District. This daunting number directly impacts public health.

An unmaintained swimming pool is a safety hazard and a perfect environment for producing mosquitoes. In one month one average sized unmaintained swimming pool could produce over 3 million adult mosquitoes, enough to significantly impair a community's health.

"Empty pools are our main concern because they quickly collect water and we hardly find them completely dry," says Mel Cook, the District's operations manager. "Even with the right equipment, keeping an empty pool completely dry is labor intensive and time consuming; less than an inch of water can start producing mosquitoes in a matter of days," he continued.

The District has seen an increase in unmaintained swimming pools and they suspect one reason may be a well-intentioned effort to conserve water. "We know our state is in the middle of a severe drought and everyone is focused on saving water. We would like people to know that leaving a pool partially filled will create conditions that produce mosquitoes," says Jason Farned, public information officer of the SGVMVCD. Farned explains that while the District supports water conservation and does not want to discourage anyone's efforts to save water, he reminds residents to consider public health as they do so. "It is critical that we all make sure that our rain barrels, fish ponds, and swimming pools do not produce mosquitoes," he says.

Keeping an empty pool dry is not the answer. "We currently know of over 1,700 pools which need regular inspections, says district manager Kenn Fujioka. " Residents who have swimming pools are responsible by law for ensuring they function properly. The District can no longer routinely inspect the growing number of empty pools. We are asking for the public's cooperation so we do not have to issue abatement notices." California's Health and Safety Code gives vector control agencies the authority to control vectors within their jurisdiction including imposing fines of up to $1,000 per day for non-compliance. "We are responsible for getting negligent property owners to remove sources of mosquitoes so the health of neighborhoods is protected." Fujioka stated.

West Nile virus is transmitted by mosquitoes and continuously threatens public health in California. In 2014 there were more than 798 human cases and 31 deaths statewide. The unusually warm winter and continuing drought have vector control agencies concerned that another active year may occur, since these conditions tend to produce more mosquitoes near people. Since there is currently no vaccine or cure for the disease, preventive measures are the most effective way to reduce infections with West Nile virus.

All property owners must keep their swimming pools functioning properly. "Lawmakers must develop regulations that both conserve water and keep pools operating so public health is not compromised. Vector control agencies do not have resources to inspect them all," says Fujioka. The SGVMVCD also encourages residents of San Gabriel Valley to actively eliminate sources that produce mosquitoes and protect themselves from bites. Here are some tips they provide:

- Examine property regularly to identify and DUMP or DRAIN standing water

- Call and REPORT excessive mosquito activity, especially mosquitoes biting during the day

- Call and REPORT green pools and standing water around neighborhood

- Wear insect REPELLENT and LONG SLEEVES to prevent bites

- Ensure screens have no holes and are tightly closed on windows and doors

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