

# PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS GIVEN AT THE 68TH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE AMERICAN MOSQUITO CONTROL ASSOCIATION, FEBRUARY 2002

## STATE OF THE ASSOCIATION 2001–2002

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**ABSTRACT.** The members of the American Mosquito Control Association (AMCA) faced 3 major challenges during the 2001–02 presidential term of Sammie Dickson. The 1st challenge was the unprecedented spread of West Nile virus (WN) across the eastern half of the USA. Second, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, caused a shift away from the spread of WN investigations to a patriotic effort to control terrorism. The terrorist attacks had a rippling effect through the U.S. economy. This downturn in the economy has forced some changes in the way AMCA will plan its Annual Meetings. Third, legislative issues on a national scale have forced AMCA members to become proactive on legislation that affects the way public health is protected in this country.

**KEY WORDS** AMCA, West Nile virus, legislation

The American Mosquito Control Association (AMCA) and its members have faced at least 3 significant challenges since the previous Annual Meeting in Dallas in 2001. The 1st challenge was the rapid expansion of West Nile virus (WN) in North America. West Nile virus was 1st detected in New York City in 1999. Initially, it was believed that this virus would exhibit a pattern much like the arboviruses that have traditionally been found in the USA, that is, western equine encephalomyelitis virus, St. Louis encephalitis virus, La Crosse virus, eastern equine encephalomyelitis virus, and California encephalitis virus. That pattern is for a particular virus to become endemic in various areas with sporadic unpredictable epidemics lasting for a year or 2 as the virus spreads. However, WN did not go away. In 2000, it was focused in 12 states and in 2001, had spread and became established in 27 states, the District of Columbia, Canada, and the Caribbean.

As WN spread across the eastern USA, thousands of birds died, hundreds of horses were infected, and dozens of humans were stricken with the virus. Crows have gone from being ignored or a nuisance to a key surveillance tool indicating the presence of WN for mosquito control districts, public health departments, and other allied health groups.

For at least the past 25 years, there has been a paucity of job openings in mosquito control in the USA. One of the good things that has happened as a result of the introduction and spread of WN is the demand for knowledgeable people in mosquito control, especially in the northeastern portion of the country. Job announcements have been continuously posted on the AMCA web site during the past year. Along with the need for trained personnel is

the formation of new mosquito control districts. The focal point of WN activity in Florida occurred in the panhandle region where few organized districts are currently in operation. The WN activity has underscored the need to protect the public health of the citizens in that area. Thus, several new mosquito control districts may be formed there.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of WN has been the increased and improved surveillance for mosquito-borne viruses across the country. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provided grant money to nearly every state health department in the country to develop and improve their capabilities of detecting WN. Many states that previously had not had arboviral surveillance capabilities are now active participants. Along with the surveillance for WN comes the added advantage of detecting some of the endemic encephalitis.

In the past, many state health departments and the local mosquito control agencies have had limited and poor cooperation. In the wake of the spread of WN both sides have realized the need of each other's expertise. This renewed partnership will undoubtedly lead to greater success for both parties, as well as the protection of public health.

Although the spread of WN across the eastern half of the country kept public health officials and mosquito control agencies busy, nothing could have prepared anyone for the incomprehensible act of terrorism that occurred on September 11, 2001 (9-11-01). Everyone can tell you exactly where he or she was, and was doing when hearing about the terrorist attacks. I know that I was struck with a sense of fear and anger. The fear was for family, friends, and fellow Americans. The anger followed as a reaction to how any individual or group of people could hold so much hatred to commit such an act.

It didn't take long to realize that our lives were changed forever. Anyone who has traveled by air since 9-11-01 realizes the need for security measures that will be in place from now on. The 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City had a \$350 million budget for security. There were 4 times as many security personnel as athletes. Immediately after 9-11-01, those in mosquito control who use aircraft realized that things were going to be different. Spray aircraft were grounded. Notices were sent out concerning security for all types of spray equipment. The public now has a paranoia for our operations to control mosquitoes that only a few short months ago was taken for granted. As we start the 2002 mosquito season, it will be a real challenge for local mosquito control agencies to build and hold the trust of the public as to the safety of our operations.

The good that has come out of 9-11-01 is a renewed patriotism. Everywhere you go the American flag is flying. T-shirts and bumper stickers abound in clever ways of declaring patriotism. It is now politically correct to be patriotic!

The loss of life from 9-11-01 was tragic, and as time has passed the effect of this event on the nation's economy has become a disaster. Before 9-11-01, the stock market had been slowly but steadily losing value. After 9-11-01, announcements from major corporations declaring bankruptcy became much more common. Announcements of job layoffs became commonplace. The stock market has become very erratic. What does all of this have to do with AMCA?

The AMCA plans its Annual Meetings 5 years in advance. Contracts with hotels have already been signed for Minneapolis-St. Paul, 2003; Savannah, 2004; Vancouver, 2005; and Detroit, 2006. These advanced contracts are necessary to make sure that ample meeting space and sleeping rooms are available for our members. Future meetings are planned and budgeted based on current and past meetings. The planning for the meeting in Denver started in 1997. At that time the economy was booming, our membership had good travel budgets, and sponsorships to AMCA were at a peak. Since that time, many companies have merged and because of the downturn in the economy have been unable to sponsor some of the normal activities at this Annual Meeting. After 9-11-01, tourism took a drastic decline. As a result, tourism tax dollars dropped off dramatically. The loss in revenue has resulted in many agencies reducing travel budgets and thus a smaller attendance at this year's AMCA Annual Meeting. To compensate, AMCA has been forced to cut back on receptions and other niceties considered standard at past meetings.

The contract with the hotel for this (Denver, 2002) Annual Meeting required AMCA to guarantee over \$270,000 in rooms and catering. Had a 2nd terrorist attack occurred between 9-11-01 and this meeting, the Annual Meeting probably would

have been cancelled. Such a cancellation would deplete most of AMCA's reserves. Thus, I hope when you hear about a dues or annual meeting registration increase you will understand that the increases cannot be taken from reserves. The reserves are needed to protect the future success of the Association.

If WN and 9-11-01 were not enough to test our membership, legislative issues continued to develop in increasing numbers. The 1st issue to draw the attention of mosquito control workers was a March 2001 decision by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. The court case was titled *Headwaters, Inc. vs. Talent Irrigation District*. Part of the courts ruling is being interpreted by some to mean that all aquatic pesticides applied to waters of the USA are pollutants. Thus, pesticides applied to or carried into a water source are pollutants and would require a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit (NPDES) before application. This would mean that mosquito control districts would be required to obtain an NPDES permit for most larviciding activities. The permit usually requires monitoring water quality and determining the fate of a pesticide before and after an application. The Salt Lake City Mosquito Abatement District, which I manage, makes thousands of larval pesticide applications every year. The cost of the monitoring work under this ruling could potentially prohibit my district from applying larvicides, the most efficient and safe way to control mosquitoes. The state of California is currently in the process of implementing an NPDES permit requirement. In 2001, I sent a letter to all AMCA members asking for donations so that the association could develop a legislative campaign to mitigate the decision of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. This appeal to the AMCA members resulted in more than \$33,000. To date, more than \$55,000 has been spent to address this cause. Unfortunately, a quick and favorable resolution to this issue is not forthcoming.

Senate Bill 1, President Bush's education bill, was another issue that required our legislative committee's time. Although we all want the best for our children, who would guess that at least 805 amendments would be attached to this bill. I mention 805 because that is the number of an amendment concerned with the use of pesticides in and around schools. This amendment would have placed such restrictive notification requirements that it would have been virtually impossible to do adult mosquito control on or near public school property. Fortunately, this amendment has been withdrawn due to AMCA's lobbying efforts. However, this issue will undoubtedly resurface in the near future.

Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act in 1997. After passage of the Act, AMCA issued several concerns to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on how the Act might adversely affect mosquito control practices in federal refuges. To address AMCA's con-

cerns, the USFWS prepared a report titled *Concerns, Issues and Recommendations to Address Mosquito Control on U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Lands* dated February 9, 1998. Part of the recommendations called for the need to develop a *Service Handbook on Mosquito Control*. Since that time, AMCA has continued to work with the USFWS in developing that book. Unfortunately, while a national handbook is being developed, at least 1 USFWS Regional Office has issued a policy that severely limits local mosquito control agencies from protecting the health and quality of life of citizens that live within the flight range of mosquitoes from these refuges. This issue continues to be a priority for the AMCA Legislative and Regulatory Committee.

Another lingering legislative issue affecting our industry concerns the Food Quality Protection Act of 1996 (FQPA). This legislation was designed to protect the health of the citizens of this country from exposure from all sources of pesticides. In order to reregister a pesticide, the manufacturer must generate tolerance and exposure levels for that pesticide. Many of the pesticides used in public health generate little or no profit to their manufacturers. Thus, it does not make good business sense for these manufacturers to spend millions of dollars to generate data so that the registration label includes mosquito control as prescribed under FQPA guidelines. When FQPA was passed, public health concerns were known and the Act contained provisions for \$12,000,000 to be used to generate minor use pesticide data for public health. However, Congress has never appropriated the money. Members of AMCA have brought these concerns to their congressmen at each of the 1st 3 Annual AMCA Days in Washington. We hope that our voice will be heard and an appropriation will be made before we lose the tools that we need to do our jobs.

The most recent legislative issue is the Draft Pesticide Registration Notice Spray and Dust Drift La-

bel Statements for Pesticide Products. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Pesticide Programs web site posted this document proposing changes to pesticide labels to eliminate unwanted drift. Some of the proposed labeling changes were likely written without mosquito control ever being considered. The AMCA is currently drafting a response expressing our members' concerns on how these label restrictions may affect mosquito control, and public health.

During my year as President of the Association (2001–02), I had the opportunity to attend the following state and regional annual mosquito control meetings: New Jersey, Louisiana, Texas, Northwest, Utah, South Carolina, Florida, Northeast, California, and Virginia. At every meeting, I was made to feel very comfortable and part of the local association. It was noticeable at all of these meetings how much pride the members had in their local association. At all of these meetings, a universal theme was repeated: "We (state or region) are the best mosquito control association in the country." After hearing this over and over, I began to wonder: do we (members) have that same pride in AMCA?

The AMCA is made up of 4 varied groups: academics, industry, government, and mosquito control. At times, we have very different needs and goals. Over the years AMCA has shifted emphasis back and forth between such things as basic research, operational issues, chemicals, equipment, and regulations. It may appear at times that we are too diverse of a group to come together and succeed as one. For those of our members who offer criticism without solution, I challenge you with this. Get involved. Participate in making AMCA what you want it to be. The AMCA is only as good as you the members make it.

To answer my own question, yes, I am proud to be a member of AMCA. I am proud to have had the opportunity to serve as this Association's President for 2001–02.