



» NEWS

Teamsters Local 714 Members Combat West Nile Virus as Mosquito Season Underway

Northwest Mosquito Abatement District Takes Aggressive Approach in Reducing Mosquito Population

Memorial Day is supposed to indicate the official start of the summer season, but with it is another season already in full swing—mosquito season. The season lasts with Illinois residents from mid-April through the second hard frost of the year, usually in October.

During that season, Teamsters are hard at work to reduce the local mosquito population and limit the potential human cases of West Nile virus. West Nile virus first emerged in the United States in 1999. West Nile virus, which is transmitted through the bite of a mosquito that has picked up the virus by feeding on an infected bird, has spread rapidly across the country.



Northwest Mosquito Abatement District mechanic Brad Knoll sprays an area for mosquitoes as part of a summer spraying route.

research-based approach to significantly impact the mosquito population. They target areas that have a high mosquito activity reputation, and schedule a spraying route throughout mosquito season.

In Illinois, West Nile virus was first discovered in September of 2001, when laboratory tests confirmed its presence in dead crows found in the Chicagoland area. By the end of 2002, Illinois recorded 884 West Nile virus human cases and 66 deaths, which was more than any other state in the United States. Statistics prove that mosquitoes and birds with West Nile virus are located throughout Cook County and surrounding areas.

The Teamsters at Northwest Mosquito Abatement District (NWMAD) use a proactive



» NEWS

Most residents don't realize that NWMAD partners with the Cook County Health Department to spray for mosquitoes and test for West Nile Virus at the Abatement's facility. The NWMAD staff also works directly with the health department to keep reports updated, collect samples in the summer, bait and collect mosquito traps.

The Northwest Mosquito Abatement staff consists of 13 full-time employees, seven of which are Teamsters including mechanics, supervisors and an assistant chief of internal services.



Northwest Mosquito Abatement District's Teamsters, from left to right: John Blankenberg, Steve Dinardo, James Podgorski, Michael Mancuso, James Thennish, Brad Knoll (kneeling) and Brian Bork.

"Before we were Teamsters, our wages were frozen for three years," said Brad Knoll, Teamsters Local 714 shop steward and 15-year NWMAD mechanic. "People were a lot happier once we got our first Teamster contract."

The members at NWMAD are currently working on their second contract with Teamster Local 714.

"In the years before we were unionized, the company tried to run the place as though it were a private company instead of a nonprofit," said Knoll. "They tried to keep the wages real low. Things were rough

for a while, but then things improved greatly once we became Teamsters five years ago."

In the workers' first Teamsters contract, they received wage increases, better benefits and the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund (IMRF) benefits.

"We were very impressed with the help we received from Local 714 President Bobby Hogan and Business Representative Danny Dilallo in pushing for that contract," said James Thennish, mechanic.

"Having a strong union contract is so valuable, especially in the current economy," said John Blankenberg, supervisor. "During contract negotiations I testified at the hearing because I feel very strongly about having union representation."

NWMAD maintains three mosquito control facilities, the main office in Wheeling and two seasonal facilities in Elk Grove and Hoffman Estates. Each facility purchases six new trucks a year.



» NEWS

During the busy mosquito season, the crew drives 15 trucks per shop throughout the county, spraying three days a week, daily and nightly.

“I enjoy the uniqueness of the job and the freedom of being outside the most,” said Knoll. “There is a great variety of things to do and we get to work with cool equipment, such as forklifts and heavy trucks with spraying units.”

The mechanics maintain a fleet of more than 50 full-sized trucks throughout the year. In addition, two all-terrain vehicles for larviciding large areas, one backhoe and one dump truck are maintained.

When they aren't spraying areas in the county, the mechanics perform routine maintenance on the vehicles, such as installing radios, lights and spraying units, refilling all trucks with pesticides and servicing engines.

Since the emergence of West Nile virus, the mechanics' jobs are much more visible to the public. The workers are proud to contribute to helping improve and protect the community's health. Even more so, they are proud to be Teamsters, working in unity under a strong labor union.