

June 2009 Release

Hillsborough County Mosquito Control Celebrates Milestone

Sixty years ago in 1949, the Hillsborough County Commissioners levied the first tax to pay for a mosquito control district in the county. Originally created to protect the public from the ravages of yellow fever, dengue fever, malaria and St. Louis Encephalitis, the organization was housed in a small barn off of Linebaugh and Armenia avenues and overseen by the Health Department.

Early mosquito control spraying consisted of making a "thermal fog," in which hot diesel oil was mixed with a DDT solution and then vaporized. So one of the first orders of business for the District was to stock two 2,000-gallon storage tanks with a 5 percent solution of DDT and fuel oil.

Like many coastal communities, Hillsborough County's 8,500 square miles of salt marsh produced hordes of mosquitoes. During those onslaughts, the fledgling organization supplemented the four-truck nightly fogging operation with contracted aerial treatments, using aircraft rented for \$55 per hour.

Larviciding involved sucking waste motor oil from underground storage tanks at service stations and garages into a 500-gallon tank mounted on a truck, mixing it with mineral spirits, and spraying it directly into ditches and other mosquito-breeding areas. In 1951, 24,465 gallons of waste oil plus 150 gallons of mineral spirits were "recycled" in this manner.

A limited surveillance program also was put into place in those early years, using a handful of light traps that would attract mosquitoes.

In 1954 a new facility was acquired on Seddon Island, now known as Harbour Island. The only access to the island was by railroad bridge, and wooden timbers were laid lengthwise along the railing for automobiles to drive across.

Along the way, the organization acquired, utilized and later sold, two C-47 spray planes, various helicopters, and a fleet of different wheeled and tracked vehicles for spraying mosquitoes and larvae in a myriad of difficult-to-reach locations. The use of DDT was halted in favor of a Malation-Lethane solution, which was later replaced by more current, permethrin-based pesticides. The use of waste motor oil was also succeeded by more ecologically-friendly larvicides and practices.

Additionally in the 1970s the use of newer, quieter ultra-low-volume sprayers were implemented, which led to complaints from citizens that they never heard the spray trucks anymore.

Today, the Unit is part of the Public Works Department and based on the perimeter of Tampa International Airport. It employs 27 staff members and a diversified fleet of vehicles, including helicopters, airboats, trucks, and ATV's to inspect for and fight mosquitoes.

As part of its surveillance program, the Unit operates 14 sentinel chicken sites and 77 mosquito surveillance traps throughout the county and conducts more than 25,000 mosquito larvae inspections per year.

It also follows the practices of integrated pest management, which uses scientifically-based preventative methods first before turning to insecticides to spray. These methods include biological controls, mosquito trapping for inspection purposes, the sentinel chickens to monitor for diseases, aquatic weed control and other methods to reduce places where mosquitoes breed, identification and destruction of mosquito larva, public education, and barrier spraying around smaller areas.

To view a gallery of photos and take an online tour of Mosquito Control in Hillsborough County during the last 60 years, visit their website and click on the "Mosquito Control Over the Years" link. On their website you also can learn more about Integrated Pest Management, what equipment they use today, how to request services, and where the Unit is spraying.