

Questions and Answers about OCVCD's New Benefit Assessment

On June 4, 2004 Orange County Vector Control District (OCVCD) will be mailing a ballot to every property owner in Orange County asking if they are willing to pay \$5.42 for each "Benefit Unit" (a single family residence, or its equivalent). Multi-family and commercial properties are assessed proportionately. For more information, visit the District's website at: www.ocvcd.org

Q. Why does the Orange County Vector Control District (OCVCD) need a new benefit assessment?

A. West Nile preparations have taxed District resources dramatically; we have dipped into reserves, and will operate at a deficit next year. If that weren't enough, the State is going to divert a huge amount of our property tax revenue for at least the next two years to help balance their budget.

Q. What is the District going to do with an additional benefit assessment?

A. We will increase our level of mosquito control to further reduce the threat from West Nile virus (WNV), and continue the current level of rodent control. The District will also resume working towards the eradication of Red Imported Fire Ants. We need to replace those dollars lost to the State for the next two years.

Q. What money is being lost to the State?

A. The State has made an agreement with local government and special districts to shift \$1.3 billion from the counties, cities and special districts. This could reduce revenues to the OCVCD by as much as \$1.5 million for each of the next two years.

Q. I hate paying taxes; most of the money goes towards supporting a bureaucracy, not doing work.

A. This assessment is different. Fees are collected locally from those receiving the benefits. It all must be spent locally and only on vector control, there is nothing going toward supporting any bureaucracy.

Q. Mosquitoes are not really a problem now. Why do we need more control?

A. WNV raises the possible consequences of being bitten by a mosquito from an annoying, itchy welt to a possibly debilitating or fatal disease. Our WNV response plan calls for a further reduction in mosquito populations by reducing our treatment cycle interval during the warmer months.

Q. Why is it so important to eradicate fire ants? They live with them in Texas.

A. The State has spent almost \$40 million on fire ants so far, with promising results, especially in Orange County. It would be a huge waste to let the ants rebound and infest the entire County. Fire ants can inflict painful stings, and to about 1% of the population, produce an allergic reaction that can be fatal. At the very least they represent a threat to our quality of life and property values.

Q. What if we wait for them to come to our yard and then treat them ourselves? Killing ants is easy.

A. Eventually fire ants will get to your backyard, but by then your entire neighborhood will probably be infested. Unless you can get all your neighbors to use the correct material on the same day, you will have little impact. Treating will be a requirement before you can use your backyard for things like a barbeque. Using the wrong material will likely exacerbate the problem. A toxin will kill ants, but not the queen. Most of our colonies in Orange County are multi-queen colonies, and killing workers will cause the queens to scatter, producing even more colonies all over the neighborhood. Homeowners treating on their own could easily be spending \$70 to \$80 per year on pesticides alone.

Q. How often would I have to treat my yard?

A. Statistics show the residents of Dallas treat their gardens an average of 32.5 times a year. That is an average, so some are treating every week, which is a lot of pesticide – far more than we want ending up in our streams and creeks. Cities will have to deal with serious runoff issues. Each treatment would probably cost more than the annual fee OCVCD is asking for in this assessment.

Q. I guess I could just move.

A. True, but you would have to disclose the presence of fire ants, which would probably impact your selling price. Fire ants will eventually infest all of irrigated Orange County if nothing is done to stop them.

Q. How will the new fire ant program be structured? Will there be another division?

A. There will not be a separate division; the entire vector control effort will be integrated. All District inspectors will be involved in detection and treatment of rats, mosquitoes, flies and fire ants.

Q. How many new employees will be hired to conduct this fire ant effort?

A. We will be contracting with pest control companies to do most of the treatment, under our supervision. The District will also conduct the post-treatment evaluation and monitoring. The District is going to need between 3-5 new employees, but growth in the County makes that necessary even without fire ants. Remember, all staff will be working on all vectors.

Q. O.K., what happens when the fire ant has been eradicated, assuming that is possible? Government programs never go away.

A. Existing OCVCD staff would all be working on rats, flies, fire ants and mosquitoes, this is the detection force. District staff would do the detection work and the initial treatment. The District has contracted with private industry to do most of the treatment. Using the data from the first visit, OCVCD would develop a work order. Pest control companies, paid by the District, would then take over the treatment until it was time to go back and evaluate success. Post treatment monitoring would be done by District staff. The District has full control, but needs for additional staff would be minimal, meaning there are few if any unneeded staff to lay off or absorb.

Q. There is a bill in Sacramento dealing with fire ants, if the State restores fire ant funding, what will happen?

A. The bill currently with the State Senate has no funding attached to it, in the event that there is money allocated for fire ants in Orange County, the Assessment will go down; but remember, almost half of this assessment is for continuing general vector control.

Q. Now the real question. When the program goes away, does the tax go back down?

A. Yes, the budget is reviewed each year by the OCVCD Board of Trustees. If less money is needed, the assessment would go down. The District has a history of raising and lowering the original assessment.

Mosquito, Fire Ant and Disease Control Assessment by Property Type

Property Type	Rate	Methodology
Single Family Homes	\$5.42	Per parcel
Condominium	\$3.25	Per parcel
Mobile Home (not in parks)	\$2.22	Per parcel
Multi Family Units	\$2.82	Per unit 1-20 units. \$0.052 per unit over 20
Commercial Industrial	\$2.71	Per 1/5 acre, up to 5 acres, \$2.71 per additional acre over 5 acres.
Vacant Property	\$2.71	Per parcel
Public/Institutional	\$5.42	Per parcel