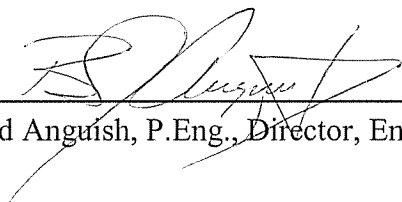




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Halifax Regional Council
May 13, 2003

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: 
Brad Anguish, P.Eng., Director, Environmental Management Services

DATE: May 7, 2003

SUBJECT: West Nile Virus

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

Some members of Regional Council have been receiving calls from their constituents regarding West Nile Virus. This report is presented to help provide some general background and contact information.

BACKGROUND

West Nile (WN) Virus is a mosquito borne virus that may be transmitted from birds to humans. It has caused outbreaks of human disease in South Africa, Europe and Russia and was first identified in North America in 1999. WN Virus was identified in birds and mosquitoes in Canada for the first time in the summer of 2001. In 2002, a small number of infected dead birds were discovered in Nova Scotia.

DISCUSSION

To prevent illness due to West Nile Virus in Nova Scotia, the Department of Health, in cooperation with several other provincial departments, has implemented a **West Nile Virus Action Plan for Nova Scotia**.

Attachment "A" includes Highlights of the 2003 Action Plan.

The following number has been set up by the Province regarding West Nile Virus general health related calls: 1-800-430-9557.

The primary point of contact for more detailed information on public health issues is the District Medical Officer of Health (MOH), who in HRM's case is Dr. Robert Strang.

To report dead birds, call the nearest office of the Department of Natural Resources.

HRM staff will maintain regular dialogue with the Provincial West Nile Virus Working Group and provide updates to Regional Council on any significant developments.

Regarding HRM, Pesticide By-law P-800 is specific to the outdoor maintenance of trees, shrubs, flowers, other ornamental plants and turf on residential use and municipally owned properties. Therefore, By-law P-800 would not apply for West Nile Virus health related mosquito control measures.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications for HRM at this time.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

ALTERNATIVES

N/A

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment "A" - Highlights of Nova Scotia's West Nile Virus Action Plan 2003

Additional copies of this report, and information on its status, can be obtained by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

Report Prepared by: Stephen King, Manager-Senior Advisor, Strategic & Sustainable Resource Management, 490-6188

Highlights of Nova Scotia's West Nile Virus Action Plan 2003

Illness due to West Nile Virus can be caused by a bite from an infected mosquito. Most infected people show very mild symptoms with no lasting effects, but the virus can cause serious illness, and can even be fatal.

To prevent illness due to West Nile Virus in Nova Scotia, the Department of Health, in cooperation with several other provincial departments (Department of Natural Resources, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, and Department of Environment and Labour) are implementing the plan. Highlights of the West Nile Virus plan are below.

1. West Nile Virus Working Group

The Working Group was established in 2000 to follow the development of West Nile Virus in other parts of North America and develop response plans for Nova Scotia. The group consists of experts in birds, mosquitoes, animals and human health who are working together to ensure a consistent and consolidated approach to protecting Nova Scotians from West Nile Virus. This group of experts is responsible for developing and implementing the West Nile Virus plan and for ongoing assessment of the risk of West Nile Virus to Nova Scotians.

2. West Nile Virus Watch

This surveillance program will be carried out throughout the summer in cooperation with the Department of Natural Resources, who will collect and test dead birds (crows, blue jays and ravens) and mosquitoes for the virus. The Department of Health will watch closely for indication of any human cases in the province.

3. Public Awareness and Education Campaign

The West Nile Virus public education campaign is part of a larger "Enjoy the Outdoors Safely" campaign developed to make Nova Scotians aware of West Nile in addition to Lyme disease and Rabies.

The West Nile portion of the campaign will include a poster and brochure containing general information, a series of fact sheets providing more detailed information, a new, easy to navigate West Nile Virus section on the existing Department of Health website, a toll-free information line for the public, articles provided to community papers and newsletters on how to protect yourself from mosquito bites, and continued contact with the media to update the public on the West Nile Virus situation in Nova Scotia.

4. Information for Health Professionals

Physicians will receive information from the Medical Officer of Health noting the status of West Nile Virus as a notifiable illness, and explaining the process of reporting human cases. The Department is also arranging information sessions with health care professionals throughout the province to explain about the signs and symptoms, diagnostic testing and treatment.

Regular contact will continue to take place with District Health Authorities, and other stakeholders to ensure that they receive all relevant information on the virus.

5. Diagnostic Testing for Human Illness

In order to ensure prompt diagnosis of West Nile Virus illness in Nova Scotia, initial testing requested by physicians will now be done in Nova Scotia, with confirmatory testing at Health Canada's National Microbiology Lab in Winnipeg if required.

6. Co-operation with Canadian Blood Services

Canadian Blood Services (CBS) will be immediately notified of West Nile Virus activity in the province, so that they can quickly assess the risk to the blood supply and take appropriate action. CBS will also notify the Department of Health if they detect the virus in donors.

7. Mosquito Control

There has been very limited West Nile Virus activity in Nova Scotia to date. This limited activity means there is not enough information available to carry out an effective mosquito control program at this time. Decisions around mosquito control will be based on ongoing assessment of health risks.