

NEWS FROM Legislator

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Resident's Request Becomes Law

Legislator D'amaro Sponsors Constituent-Inspired Legislation Notifying Local Residents About Scheduled Mosquito Spraying

(HUNTINGTON STATION, NY... October 18, 2010) – For anyone who has ever wondered how to get their voice heard by local government, the recent passage of a new Suffolk County law proves that sometimes all it takes is one phone call.

Following a call to his office over the summer from a concerned Huntington Station resident, Suffolk Legislator Lou D'Amaro (D-Huntington Station) introduced a bill requiring the County to provide telephone and text message notifications to all persons residing in areas where ground and/or aerial mosquito control pesticide spraying will occur. The Suffolk County Legislature unanimously approved the legislation at its October 12th meeting and County Executive Steve Levy is expected to sign the bill into law.

“The passage of this bill is a true example of democracy in action,” said Legislator D'Amaro. “I always tell my constituents that I need to know what is on their minds to effectively govern and I encourage them to contact me with any new ideas. This particular constituent was concerned about possible pesticide exposure and requested information about scheduled mosquito sprayings in her area so she could take the proper precautions should the need arise. It was a very reasonable request that got the ball rolling on instituting a new countywide notification policy.”

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The Suffolk County Department of Health Services regularly seeks to protect County residents from West Nile Virus by conducting ground and aerial vector control spraying in high risk areas where disease carrying mosquitoes have been identified. The Department advises all individuals, especially children, the elderly and expectant mothers, to remain indoors with the windows and doors closed during and shortly after mosquito spraying to protect their health. Presently, information about upcoming sprayings is posted on the Department's webpage, sent via email to residents who have previously requested notifications and forwarded to local newspapers and television stations. However, there is no guarantee that the media will provide the information to the public or that residents will even read about it in the newspaper or see it on television. When the constituent shared these very same concerns with Legislator D'Amaro he immediately reached out to County officials to find a better and broader way to disseminate the spraying schedule.

"While the low-dose sprayings are considered safe for most populations, I agreed with my constituent that individuals should have the option to decide what, if any, precautions they want to take when spraying is scheduled in their neighborhoods," D'Amaro said. "This concept goes hand in hand with our ongoing efforts to promote an open and transparent government."

Once the notification idea was established, the next step in the process was finding the most cost-efficient, taxpayer-friendly method of dissemination. After consultations between Legislator D'Amaro, County Executive Levy's office and representatives from the Division of Vector Control, the officials decided that the County could utilize its existing CodeRED emergency notification system. CodeRED is capable of making pre-recorded calls to landline telephones and also providing similar notice via cell phone and email on an opt-in basis. The system, which is already fully funded and operational, gives the County the ability to make thousands of calls to specified areas in a relatively short period of time. There is also a sufficient amount of pre-paid minutes to include mosquito spraying calls to the current list of CodeRED emergency notifications at no additional cost to the County.

"We congratulate Legislator D'Amaro for using new technology to give notice to constituents about spraying in the area," said Suffolk Executive Steve Levy.

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Although the 2010 spraying season has officially ended, Vector Control will resume their mosquito control program in May 2011, if necessary. The new notification system will be in place and fully functional prior to the next spraying season. Instructions on how residents can opt-in to the cell phone and email notification methods will be provided during each pre-recorded message sent to individuals with landline phones residing in areas where spraying will occur or residing in areas likely to be affected by such spraying.

“I thank my colleagues in the Legislature for supporting this innovative, constituent-driven proposal,” D’Amaro said. “We now have the ability to provide advance notice to specifically targeted areas of the County that may be impacted by mosquito spraying. Most importantly, we can accomplish this policy directive at no additional cost to taxpayers, which is win-win situation for our residents. The successful implementation of this program clearly illustrates that the best proposals are almost always homegrown. You never know when today’s idea could become tomorrow’s law.”

For more information about mosquito control, please call the Suffolk County Division of Vector Control at (631) 852-4270 during their regular office hours Monday to Friday, 8:30 am to 4:00 pm. You may also contact the Division via email at SC.Vector@co.suffolk.ny.us

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Suffolk County Legislator Lou D’Amaro (D-Huntington Station) represents the 17th Legislative District, which includes parts of Huntington Station, Huntington, South Huntington, Melville, West Hills, Dix Hills, Deer Park, North Babylon and West Babylon. He is Chairman of the Ways & Means committee, Vice-Chairman of the Environment, Planning & Agriculture committee and Vice-Chairman of the Budget & Finance committee of the Suffolk County Legislature.