

Don't Spray Me! 2018 Annual Report

2018 was a year of transitions. Don't Spray Me! was founded in 2015 in a wave of dissatisfaction with a plan to spray anti-mosquito insecticide in the NE section of the Borough. 2016 and 2017 were years of building a network of Block Captains, distributing a letter from the Mayor and an educational doorhanger from the Borough, and collaborating with the Borough Sustainability Coordinator and County Director of Department of Health through the West Nile Task Force originally set up by then-Mayor Carolyn Comitta in 2012. In 2017 DSM became a Conservation Committee within Sierra Club's Southeastern PA Group.

What has changed? The West Nile Task Force met only once in 2018, the Sustainability Coordinator position has been vacant since August, and the Department of Health has ceased sharing information publicly about its own activities, so that we have resorted to PA Right To Know procedures to find material that is in the public domain. Also, partly as a result of an unacceptably worded doorhanger and delayed printing of its replacement, Block Captains began to lose their commitment; some said they did not realize this would be such a long-term effort. As a result, we plan to go to a new system in 2019, with several leaders in each of the Borough's 7 wards taking responsibility for distribution of materials and information.

We had expected that in 2018, the Borough and County would be working together to identify and larvicide sites where standing water allowed mosquitoes to breed in quantity. As it turned out, the County conducted only 3 larvicide events in the entire Borough all summer, and did not treat the mosquito hot spots at all during the high mosquito season. It was an increasingly bad mosquito season through July and August, although once again we know of no incidents of mosquito-borne illness in the Borough. In the fall, Borough government agreed to take over larviciding in the Borough from the County, and we look forward to much greater responsiveness to residents' needs in 2019.

We successfully worked with West Chester Borough Council to fend off planned truck-based spraying on August 16 but unfortunately on Sept. 11 the County sprayed half of the planned area in the Borough before abandoning the effort in rainy weather. Mosquitoes seemed little affected, though a few other dead insects were observed. Our science team also took readings of pesticide levels deposited in various settings but unfortunately it has proved difficult to get the results measured in a lab due to labs' wariness about the chemicals involved.

In 2018, our Executive Board met 10 times to provide overall guidance to our effort. Although the Board has had members from other municipalities, those became involved in parallel

environmental efforts and the Board evolved to represent only West Chester Borough. East Bradford municipality has continued distributing natural mosquito control information to its residents and West Goshen and East Goshen have been moving toward their own environmental advisory committees, with which we hope to work. In other urban areas, efforts to inspire groups related to Don't Spray Me! have not yet succeeded; although some residents of Phoenixville and Downingtown were sprayed in 2018 and 2017 respectively, our progress there has not advanced beyond initial discussions, nor in Kennett Square. Our web site and Facebook page continue to serve as a resource for all interested.

As part of our publicity campaign, we have a very recognizable “gas mask baby” yard sign and logo dating to 2016 as well as the 2017 “happy baby” model. In 2018, we introduced the in-between statement of the baby holding his gas mask. People choose one to suit their views. Results and visibility are good.

Events that we organized and/or co-sponsored with other environmental groups included:

- “Saving the Environment: Pennsylvania to Paris,” a discussion with 3 highly qualified speakers on Feb. 25, with about 90 in attendance.
- An Earth Day rally, March for the Environment, and displays on April 22, with over 150 attendees.
- A talk to about 30 people by our entomological advisor Dr. John Jackson on “Bugs and Weeds Away--the Natural Way” on May 29.
- A display at CommUNITY day at the Melton Center on August 19.
- A (small) demonstration at the County Court House on August 31.
- The Fall Environmental Film Series at West Chester University, with attendance averaging around 75 for four films.
- A sizable Chester County March for Climate Justice and Environment as part of a national movement on Sept. 10.
- A public meeting about mosquito spraying in West Chester with about 30 people on Sept. 25.
- A very successful fundraiser dinner and auction on Dec. 1 with about 75 attendees.

- A particular success was the Sierra Club Youth Corps / Adopt a Drain Field program, directed by Rachel Davis with WCU graduate student and DSM intern Kyle Erisman, whose stipend was covered by a Sierra Club Grassroots Network grant, for which we are grateful, as well as for support for some of our other efforts. On a number of Sunday afternoons spread through the summer, several youths and others assessed the condition of Borough storm drains and removed plastic and organic matter that could have blocked runoff from going through the grates at street level. Meanwhile, Kyle mapped the drains using GIS technology and shared the results with the Borough's Public Works department; those data will be invaluable in future years for spotting drain issues and conducting larviciding.

Growing out of the collaborative Earth Day event, Don't Spray Me! and other groups founded a new Chester County Environment Alliance, a framework for different organizations to collaborate on planning and programming and to amplify others' activities. The Alliance met on May 19 and two other times in 2018 and intensified its cooperation on large public activities.

In addition, in the fall we were instrumental in founding a West Chester Area Green Team, which now groups efforts in renewable energy and climate protection, elimination of unnecessary plastic usage, and avoidance of toxic pesticides and herbicides. Don't Spray Me! will work within that new entity while remaining within the Sierra Club, except that our Youth Corps will now become part of the Green Team.

In sum, DSM achieved good visibility and carried out a number of events and the Youth Corps program. Although distribution of materials and prevention of spraying in the Borough and elsewhere did not go as well as planned, we laid the framework for a whole new relation with the Borough, for municipally-controlled larviciding to avoid pressure to spray, and for collaboration with other environmental groups in the County.