

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1959

of the

BUREAU OF INSECT PEST CONTROL

For the fiscal year 1959 it would be very difficult for the present Bureau Chief to report on any more than statistics except for the last quarter of the year.

Two major problems were confronted during the past year. One, the Dutch elm disease which has been with us for many years. The other, the controversy between the advocates of spraying and those opposed to spraying, which is assuming more importance each day.

The Dutch elm disease is continuing its rapid depletion of the elms in the state. At the present time, as has been the case for many years, the best known means of attack on the incursions of this disease are by quick removal of confirmed Dutch elm diseased trees, removal of dying and recently dead elm wood to eliminate breeding areas for the beetles which spread the disease, and spraying with DDT in an attempt to control the feeding of the beetles. Immediately we run up against the problem of funds to do this work. Not necessarily funds at the state level, but funds at the local level. When many things must be considered by a local finance board it is not difficult to understand its reluctance to appropriate all of the money needed to finance a complete Dutch elm disease program.

During the fiscal year, 1959, the Bureau has assisted cities and towns by helping, through use of our tree removal crews and equipment, in the removal of 2,054 diseased trees. Only those municipalities earning assistance according to Chapter 657, Acts of 1956, were given this aid.

In the calendar year 1958, figures from the Shade Tree Laboratory at the University of Massachusetts indicate that 12,255 trees were laboratory tested and found to have the Dutch elm disease. According to records in the bureau office 10,306 trees were removed. Not all of these were 1958 trees, however, as some dated back as far as 1954. Those confirmed in previous years and allowed to remain standing until this year are the main reason for the swift spread of the disease. Immediate removal must be effected in order to gain the upper hand. It is estimated that approximately 70% of those trees removed were of the 1958 crop.

Assuming that the same percentage of trees were also removed of the 1957 crop, it is safe to predict that 12 to 14,000 confirmed diseased trees capable of spreading the Dutch elm disease remain standing at the present time. Many thousands more which have the disease, would have to be added to this figure, but they have not been confirmed by the Shade Tree Laboratory.

To date nothing has proven more satisfactory in the control of the insect pests under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Insect Pest Control than DDT. It is especially good in combatting insects such as the fall cankerworm, the brown-tail moth, the gypsy moth and other leaf feeding insects. One application, properly timed and applied, is all that is needed to control an infestation. Being cyclic by nature it would be a number of years before the pest became prevalent again. This would rule out any danger of yearly repeated doses of insecticide or any chance of resistance to the insecticide by the pest. In DDT we have an excellent forest management tool.

The controversy these days concerning the use of insecticides has reached the point where we who use insecticides may lose the right to do so. There is basis for argument on both sides of the question. On the one hand, the indiscriminate spraying of large areas without any thought for fish and wildlife and with no trained personnel in charge should not be condoned. On the other hand, the hysterical cries and accusations of those opposing spraying are unsubstantiated by any evidence. Due to the fact that there are extremists on either side of the question whose efforts are hindering the general use of pesticides, there is a resolve in Chapter 55 of the Acts and Resolves of 1959, calling for an investigation and study by a special commission relative to the use of pesticides and the effects of aerial and ground spraying of insects and crops within the Commonwealth. Properly carried out, this study should answer some of the questions now confronting the general public in regards to pest control.

No spraying was performed by the bureau during the past fiscal year. The low population level of our most serious woodland pest, the gypsy moth, did not warrant any participation in a large scale project. Indications, at the present time, however, are that there will be a number of local outbreaks in 1960 and by 1961 we should be prepared to wage a large scale control project against this pest.

During the year the bureau participated in mosquito control, by use of our mistblowers, on twenty-five of the recreational areas under the supervision of the Department of Natural Resources. Twenty-one of these areas received two applications.

A very important transaction has recently been completed involving the Department and the Nu-Brite Chemical Co. In order to get out of the insecticide manufacturing business a deal was made with the above company whereby we would receive drums of finished emulsifiable DDT in exchange for our stockpile of technical DDT. For 75,000 lbs. of DDT we received 249 drums of finished 25% insecticide, each containing 50 gallons. The finished product was used in the spraying of the aforementioned recreation areas and as a reimbursement item to those cities and towns earning it. 196 drums were given as reimbursement.

The few cents more of cost per gallon for insecticide used in future spray projects will be far outweighed by the elimination of the manufacturing process and the fact that a number of good field men can be released for more important work such as closer check on the actual spray operation.

Last but not least should be mentioned the retirement in December of 1958 of Mr. Harold L. Ramsey after 17 years as Chief of the bureau.

*C. S. Hood*

---

Bureau Chief