

PREVENT & PROTECT

PIE CENTER IMPACTS MOSQUITO CONTROL
COMMUNICATION IN FLORIDA

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Center for
Public Issues Education

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PREVENT & PROTECT



The University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (PIE Center) has developed a multi-faceted communication campaign to increase awareness of mosquito control in Florida.

Prevent & Protect is the result of two grants: one from the Florida Department of Health (DOH) funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and one from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). The organizations wanted the PIE Center to create communication materials that local officials could use to proactively address questions and concerns from community members regarding mosquitoes.

Mosquito control programs aim to protect the public from disease outbreaks, reduce nuisance mosquitoes and preserve Florida's economy.

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-Andrea Lucky

While creating Prevent & Protect materials, the PIE Center conferred with multiple scientists to ensure the content's accuracy. Experts included individuals with the CDC Southeastern Center of Excellence in Vector-Borne Diseases, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) and the University of Florida's Department of Entomology and Nematology.

“Prevent & Protect is a true collaborative effort. We included communications and education researchers with entomologists so that the materials we created are accurate and help people understand the benefits of mosquito control efforts in Florida,” said Ricky Telg, agricultural education and communication professor and PIE Center director. “Prevent & Protect resources include lesson plans, print materials, videos and electronic field trips.”

UF entomology and nematology doctoral student Casey Parker contributed to the project by verifying the scientific accuracy of Prevent & Protect materials.

“I have had the opportunity to be involved in the development of the science communication videos,” Parker said. “I am also making lesson plans and working with the team to bring all of the components of this project together.”

Two media toolkits — Mosquito Control and Emergency Response — were created based on the results of focus group research and input from mosquito experts, like Parker. The purpose of these toolkits was to provide mosquito control districts, public officials and other organizations with materials to educate their communities about mosquito-related issues. Each toolkit included pre-made social media posts, infographics, rack cards and info-sheets.

“My goal for Prevent & Protect is to provide materials to mosquito control districts so they can further disseminate them to their communities,” Parker said.

Advertisements were placed in multiple Florida agricultural and health magazines. Targeted emails

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RICKY TELG

were used to spread information about the project directly to IFAS Extension faculty and Florida Emergency Preparedness Association (FEPA) members. Two webinars were held on June 21 and July 9, 2018, to inform the public about mosquito control and Prevent & Protect resources.

In February 2019, the new Prevent & Protect website, www.preventmosquitoes.org, was launched to further the outreach efforts for this project.

UF assistant professor of entomology and nematology Andrea Lucky assisted the PIE Center in creating messages for outreach efforts.

“My role in the Prevent & Protect project is to help people understand what mosquitoes are and explain the steps we can take to protect ourselves,” Lucky said. “Many people have misconceptions about which mosquitoes are dangerous and what they can do to control and prevent the spread of diseases.”

The Prevent & Protect project has taken a comprehensive approach to addressing mosquito issues in Florida. By using Prevent & Protect materials, public officials can address common misconceptions about mosquito control and encourage citizens to be proactive in reducing mosquito populations in their communities.

“In Florida, one of the biggest things we can do is support mosquito control efforts by trying to do our own mosquito control at home,” Parker said. “We need to support the efforts of public health professionals who are taking action to protect the community from mosquitoes and mosquito-borne diseases.”

MULTIMEDIA

As part of the Prevent & Protect grant, the PIE Center and the UF/IFAS Department of Entomology and Nematology produced engaging multimedia content for social media and the website, www.preventmosquitoes.org.

In early 2019, filmmakers Rob Nelson and Jonas Stenstrom with video production company Untamed Science created a series of educational videos on various mosquito topics. These videos are currently displayed on the Prevent & Protect Facebook page and website.

Creating multimedia content and expanding web and social media presence has been influential in improving outreach and engaging with the public.

“The goal of these new additions to the project is to improve the accessibility of Prevent & Protect materials,” said PIE Center education coordinator Phillip Stokes.

Two comprehensive toolkits and other key resources are easily accessible on the Prevent & Protect website. As Prevent & Protect has grown, the PIE Center has been proactive in ensuring that materials are accessible to all Floridians. All of the content on the new website is available in English and Spanish. The media components from the Mosquito Control and Emergency Response toolkits are available in English, Spanish and Haitian Creole.

EDUCATION & OUTREACH

An important component of the Prevent & Protect project is education. The PIE Center developed lesson plans and educational programs on mosquitoes that are used throughout Florida and across the world.

UF assistant professor of agricultural education and communication Jamie Loizzo led the development of an electronic field trip program entitled “Scientist Online: The Science of Mosquitoes,” which allows students around the world to connect with University of Florida scientists via Skype in the Classroom.



Andrea Lucky speaks with students from Pakistan via Scientist Online during an electronic field trip.

“We connected with elementary to high school classrooms in Canada, Pennsylvania and Florida, as well as college-aged students in a boarding school in Pakistan,” Loizzo said. “The entire program is a great example of how science communicators, educators and scientists can work together to make a memorable and positive impact for improving awareness and understanding of mosquito research and applied prevention steps that we can take in our everyday lives.”

In addition to electronic field trips, lesson plans were developed and taught in classrooms throughout Florida to educate students about mosquitoes. Lesson plans are available to download on the website: www.preventmosquitoes.org.

As the educational efforts for Prevent & Protect grow, the PIE Center continues to conduct research around the state to measure the public’s understanding of mosquito issues. Improving the public’s knowledge about mosquito control and health risks associated with mosquitoes is a significant goal of the Prevent & Protect project.

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