WEEKLY SAFETY TIP – 5/16/11 – WHY IS A DEAD BIRD IMPORTANT?

Less than a week ago, health officials in West Covina, CA announced that a dead crow tested positive for West Nile Virus, signaling the official start of the West Nile Virus season for California. Why is a dead bird important? Mosquitoes bite birds that can carry diseases such as the West Nile Virus, encephalitis, chagas etc., and then transmit the disease to us when the mosquito bites a human. You could get sick.

Standing water is one of the favorite hiding places for mosquitoes. Many times we can reduce our chances of being bitten by mosquitoes through eliminating any standing water at work and at home. But sometimes you don't have the ability to reduce standing water. A good example of this is the recent flooding of the Mississippi River. It will take weeks to recede, leaving residual standing water covering thousands of acres. Water causes many issues, beyond just insects. To read more about the hazards and how to protect yourself, follow this link to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s page on Returning to Flooded Areas: http://www.cdc.gov/Features/AfterAFlood/

OSHA has issued several bulletins and Safety Topic pages with Precautions for the West Nile Virus, one of the more common illnesses that can result from insect bites. One that we recommend is this bulletin on Workplace Precautions, found through this link: http://www.osha.gov/dts/shib/shib082903b.html,
OSHA recommends using the hierarchy of controls to protect yourself and your workers.

Engineering and Administrative Controls:

- Take precautions to reduce the chances of standing water accumulating around equipment, such as from condensation, etc.
- Regularly inspect work areas to reduce standing water.
- When possible, flex work hours to reduce the exposure during early morning or late evening hours, when mosquitoes are more likely to be out and biting.
- Establish a policy for workers to avoid touching dead birds and to report them as soon as possible.
- Alert authorities when a dead bird is found.

Employee Training:

- Provide training to your workers about the hazards of standing water and biting insects.
- Encourage your workers to use insect repellent with DEET or Picaridin.
- Provide training on the signs and symptoms of diseases and illnesses that result from insect bites – and to report those illnesses to you.

Personal Protective Equipment:

- Spray on insect repellent when working outside.
- Wear loose, light colored long sleeves and pants.
- If an employee should be required to pickup a dead bird or animal, they should wear gloves if possible, and use an inverted plastic bag that can be wrapped around it, preventing contact.