

Eye Gnat Frequently Asked Questions

Eye Gnats:

1. What are eye gnats?
 - a. Eye gnats are tiny flying insects that breed in a variety of settings from wilderness areas to irrigated agriculture in the warmer climates of the United States. Eye gnats are attracted to the eyes, noses and mouths of people and animals, seeking a protein source. While there are other species of flies which may have similar behavior, the new ordinance specifically refers to gnats in the genera *Hippelates* or *Liohippelates*.
2. What time of year are eye gnats the biggest problem in San Diego County?
 - a. Eye gnats can be active anytime the temperature is over 70 degrees with the most activity occurring when temperatures get into the 90's. This usually means the peak of activity will be during the warmer summer months.
3. Why does the State of California consider eye gnats a vector, but up until now San Diego County did not?
 - a. The County of San Diego Department of Environmental Health (DEH) Vector Control Program primary focus is on organisms that can transmit diseases to humans.
4. Why doesn't DEH enforce the state definition of a vector?
 - a. The state vector control law authorizes the County to have vector control programs, but how programs are implemented is described in local ordinance. The County's ordinance currently defines "vector" more narrowly than state law.
5. Why is the County proposing to include eye gnats as a vector?
 - a. The County does not currently exercise the authority available under state law to regulate eye gnats as a vector. Therefore, the County cannot issue orders to abate eye gnats when they reach nuisance levels. The new ordinance would restore the County's authority to issue abatement orders for eye gnats.

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Farm related questions:

6. What are buffer crops?
 - a. Buffer crops are rows of plants, such as alfalfa, that are treated weekly with conventional pesticides to prevent gnats from leaving the farm.

7. What is a barrier cloth?
 - a. A barrier cloth is a physical barrier such as silt fence material, which is placed at the edge of the farm. Gnats tend to fly close to the ground. Research has demonstrated that a physical barrier may stop or disrupt their flight path, preventing them from leaving the farm.

8. Do farms require a permit to operate? If so, can it be revoked?
 - a. Permits are not required for farms as long as the property is zoned agriculture.

9. Are there any effective pesticides that are considered organic?
 - a. Research has shown that organic pesticides have a limited effect by themselves. However, organic pesticides in combination with other farming best management practices, can improve overall control of eye gnats. Research in this area is underway.

Enforcement Issues:

10. What enforcement actions can be taken?
 - a. If the proposed ordinance is approved, Vector Control will work with the farmer to develop a voluntary eye gnat abatement plan in consultation with the Farm and Home Advisor. If the farmer does not comply with the voluntary plan, an order to abate can be issued requiring a mandatory plan. If new research results in additional validated abatement measures being identified, these measures can also be ordered. However, any abatement measure must be validated, applicable and practicable for that farm.

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11. Can fines be imposed if a farmer does not comply with voluntary or mandatory orders?

- a. If a farmer does not comply with or appeal an order to abate, civil penalties can be imposed by the Director.

12. The farmer is not the property owner does the property owner share some responsibility?

- a. If the County determines that a public nuisance exists it may issue an order to abate to the property owner as well as the farmer.

13. Can you force the farmer to shut down or use conventional pesticides?

- a. Under extreme conditions, in which abatement plans do not adequately abate County verified eye gnat nuisances, the Director may petition the Eye Gnat Abatement Appeals Board for relief from abatement order limitations. The petition would have to receive concurrence by the Eye Gnat Abatement Appeals Board for the Director to take action.

14. What agency certifies organic farming status?

- a. Organic certifications are issued by private certifying organizations. Those organizations must be registered with the California Department of Food and Agriculture.

15. Can private citizens file suit against the farmer or the property owner?

- a. This ordinance does not limit the right of any person affected by an agricultural operation that is a nuisance to seek judicial abatement of that nuisance pursuant to the Civil Code.

Department of Agriculture Weights and Measure:

16. What role will Department of Agriculture Weights and Measure have if eye gnats are considered a vector?

- a. The exact role is not defined at this time. The proposed ordinance will allow the Director of Environmental Health to delegate such powers and

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responsibilities for vector control to the Director of the County Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures if it is mutually agreed between those Directors, provided that such delegations must be related to agricultural operations or to eye gnats generally.

Eye Gnat Traps:

17. Can a resident make an eye gnat trap?

- a. Yes. Detailed instructions are posted on the Vector Control Program website for both a simple trap and one that performs better but is more complex to build:

www.sdcounty.ca.gov/deh/pests/pdf/Eye_Gnats/eye_gnat_trap_instructions.pdf

18. Do eye gnat traps use bait? If so, what kind of bait is used?

- a. The bait in the trap is a mixture of eggs and water. The normal recipe is about 5 eggs per gallon of water. It is not a pesticide and does not kill the eye gnats. The gnats cannot get out of the trap and die inside it.

19. Does the County provide eye gnat traps to the general public?

- a. No. At this time traps are the responsibility of the property owner. However, instructions on how to build traps can be found on the County Vector Control Program website at:

http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/deh/pests/eyegnats/eyegnats_home.html