UNMANNED AERIAL SYSTEMS (UAS) IN MOSQUITO AND VECTOR CONTROL

ISSUE: Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS), or drones, provide numerous advantages for vector control programs. Any existing policies or legislation need to effectively balance the need to maintain public safety and privacy, while allowing the use of drones to manage mosquito populations and protect the public's health.

Background: UAS are aircraft platforms that are regulated by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and are currently used for mosquito control and by environmental conservation groups in a number of states. Use of UAS for mosquito control has proven to be efficient, effective and safe. In sensitive and hard to reach areas, UAS operations can be less disruptive to wildlife than the use of ground applications. They can also provide a significant cost savings over the use of manned aircraft.

Discussion: The AMCA is concerned that pending legislation at both the Federal and State levels, if enacted, may unintentionally and unduly restrict the use of UAS for public health and vector control purposes. AMCA understands that there may be concern over certain uses of UAS such as proposed legislation that requires a search warrant for law enforcement use of UAS, or a requirement to purge information collected by a UAS regardless of the specific content of the information. It is important to realize that vector control uses of UAS by public agencies do not operate in the same geographies or with the same purposes as law enforcement, nor do we broadly collect and store information from UAS. Instead, we use UAS to specifically assess areas for mosquito habitat and make standard applications of public health insecticides, as appropriate, to reduce mosquitoes and the transmission of vector-borne diseases. The AMCA is currently working to develop a UAS "best practices" training manual which will provide guidance for mosquito and vector control agencies in using UAS in their programs. The manual uses a science-based approach to help ensure safe and effective mosquito and vector control missions, incorporating safety risk assessment, mitigation procedures if needed, and regulatory compliance guidance.

Vector control faces challenges such as the spread of invasive mosquito species, vector-borne disease outbreaks such as West Nile virus, Eastern Equine Encephalitis, Zika. Additionally, the threat of new invasive mosquitoes and diseases is ever present. UAS technology is helping public agencies develop next generation tools to meet these challenges and best utilize limited resources to provide continued public health protection from mosquitoes and the disease-causing agents they may transmit.

NEEDED ACTION: Any legislation concerning UAS needs to reflect their legitimate and safe use by public and private mosquito and vector control entities operating under AMCAs best practices guidelines in their mission to protect public health and safety and not unduly restrict our ability to effectively carry out that mission.