

# San Joaquin County Mosquito and Vector Control District board responds to grand jury

By Ross Farrow/News-Sentinel Staff Writer | Posted: Wednesday, July 17, 2013 9:04 am

The San Joaquin County Mosquito and Vector Control District board pledged on Tuesday to include more detailed information about its finances and other administrative activity, but the board disagrees with portions of a county grand jury report that are critical of some of the district's operations.

In a report issued in June, the grand jury said that the San Joaquin County Mosquito and Vector Control District does a good job of killing mosquitoes and protecting residents from the potentially deadly West Nile virus, but it doesn't keep the public well-informed about fiscal operations and other matters.

For example, the grand jury questioned whether the mosquito board should provide itself with health insurance coverage that costs taxpayers \$66,439 per year.

The report also states that the 11 board members aren't familiar with the district budget.

Chris Eley, attorney for the mosquito district, said during Tuesday afternoon's board meeting that he talked to most of the board members individually about the accusations. He found that they are familiar with the district budget despite not having budget details committed to memory.

The grand jury inquiry "became something of a test of a trustee's memory, rather than a meaningful discussion about the budget," Eley said in the response approved by the board on Tuesday. "Board members come from a variety of different backgrounds, and some of them hold numbers in their head longer than others.

"It is not critical that a board member be able to remember the exact size of the budget voted on seven months earlier," Eley said in preparing the board's response to the grand jury.

However, the board pledged to include more financial information on the district's website in the future.

Eley recommended that the mosquito abatement board reconsider a controversial policy to provide board members the same health insurance that employees receive.

"I don't think there's any impropriety," Eley told the board.

However, he advised the board to revisit the issue due to the public interest, particularly by the grand jury and the San Joaquin Taxpayers Association, about the health insurance issue.

"The district provides a service vital to protecting the health of the community," the mosquito boards official response reads. "Taxpayer support is critical to providing the level of service necessary, and thus

it is equally critical that taxpayers have confidence in the decisions made by the board.”

Eley advises that any new vote on the health care issue for the board should be on a roll-call basis.

In approving its response to the grand jury, the board disagreed with a recommendation that board members serve no more than two four-year terms.

“The district has provided good service to the community for over 50 years,” the board responded. “The system is not broken and, thus, does not need to be fixed.”

The board consists of one trustee appointed by the cities of Lodi, Stockton, Lathrop, Tracy, Manteca, Ripon and Escalon. The other four trustees are appointed by the Board of Supervisors.

Northern San Joaquin County board members include chairman Marc Warmerdam and Jack Fiori Sr., of Lodi and Mike Manna of Acampo.

The board has one regular meeting per month and studies reports from district Manager Eddie Lucchesi and other employees to prepare for the meetings.

In other action Tuesday, the board adopted a \$7.1 million budget for the 2013-14 fiscal year, which began July 1. Major revenue sources include \$3.6 million in property tax throughout the county and \$2.8 million in charges for services. Major expenses include \$4.6 million in employee salaries and benefits, and \$2.8 millions for services and supplies.

*Contact reporter Ross Farrow at [rossf@lodinews.com](mailto:rossf@lodinews.com).*