

State to spray gypsy moth lairs

By NANCY BARR

Part of the San Lorenzo Valley will soon be sprayed with pesticides to eliminate an insect eradication, but this time the area is infested with gypsy moths, not Mediterranean fruit flies.

Pesticides will be applied next spring in Felton in an effort to eradicate the gypsy moth, officials of the state Department of Food and Agriculture announced at a Santa Cruz press conference today.

Following the detection of several gypsy moths in Felton near Highway 9 in July, the county Agricultural Commissioner's office conducted a search for gypsy-moth egg masses.

"When you keep on finding repeat finds — and we found an egg mass on a fence — this is

what indicates a reproducing population," said Isi Siddiqui, assistant director of the pest detection division of the state department.

A scientific advisory committee reviewed the information about the Felton infestation and recommended eradication be planned for the spring.

The eradication effort will include both ground and aerial spraying over a total of 250 acres, Siddiqui said. A section of Fremont in the east San Francisco Bay, where the gypsy moth has also been detected, will also undergo an eradication program, but only with ground spraying.

Two different materials will be used to eradicate the gypsy moth in Felton. The pesticide carbaryl, known widely under its trade name of Sevin, will be applied from ground sprayers directly onto the host trees. Most native and ornamental trees in the area are considered gypsy moth hosts or potential hosts, Siddiqui said.

Specifically, redwoods, oak, Douglas fir, madrone, ornamental shrubs and most fruit trees will be sprayed with carbaryl. Bedding plants, lawns and vegetable gardens will not be part of the ground spraying program.

Carbaryl cannot be applied to bodies of water, so it will not be sprayed along the banks of the San Lorenzo River or Fall Creek, parts of which fall within the eradication area. Therefore, the ground spraying will be augmented by aerial spraying of a biological compound called *Bacillus thuringiensis*, or commonly referred to as B.t.

Carbaryl will be applied to 175 acres; B.t. will be applied to a total of 250 acres, including the area where the carbaryl is applied. Carbaryl will be applied three times at intervals of 10 to 14 days, Siddiqui said, and the B.t. will be applied by helicopter weekly for between four and six weeks.

The purpose of applying the B.t. is to reach the areas that cannot be covered with the ground sprayers. Most important are the areas along the waterways and in the tall trees, mostly redwoods, which cannot easily be reached from the ground.

Other infestations of the gypsy moth in California have shown that B.t. alone will not eradicate the pest, Siddiqui said, therefore it can only be used as a supplement to the ground-spraying of carbaryl.

In response to questions about the safety of applying both Carbaryl and B.t., state officials said they are sure their application methods will prevent any harm to people in the area. B.t., while deadly to caterpillars, is benign to humans, according to Dr. Peter Kurtz, a state toxicologist. Carbaryl will only be applied directly on trees that may host gypsy moths, the officials said, and therefore should not pose any problem.

"I can state categorically there's no risk involved to human health with ground spraying of carbaryl," Siddiqui said.

Acting Agricultural Commissioner Dick Nutter added that carbaryl is frequently used by farmers and home gardeners and does not pose any health hazard when applied in accordance with label instructions.

Santa Cruz County Public Health officer George Wolfe has said he plans to review the state's plans for sampling of pesticide residues.

Dr. Wolfe said he believes county officials can best determine the places where sampling is essential, and he will work with the state officials to try to get sampling done in the right places. For instance, he said, in addition to testing the water in the San Lorenzo River in the spraying area, the river should be tested downstream to see if any pesticides get into the water, which feeds the city of Santa Cruz's water supply.

Siddiqui said a public meeting will be held in Felton in January to inform the local residents about the eradication program.

Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau President Sherry Mehl, commenting from Lake Tahoe where she is attending a convention, said her organization is supportive of the state's eradication plans.

"We feel the quicker the action is taken, the more positive the result is going to be," Mehl said.