

Spraying for moths stirring controversy

By ELIZABETH SCHILLING

The discovery of seven gypsy moths in Felton traps last summer means the town is set for sprayings which agriculture officials hope will eradicate the pest before it spreads.

The gypsy moth, which attacks evergreen trees and some fruit trees and bushes, is known for its voracious appetite and has left many eastern forests with a perpetual winter appearance. In its caterpillar stage, the moth's weight increases a thousandfold and it is considered the most damaging leaf-eating pest.

Some Felton residents have threatened court action to stop the ground spraying of carbaryl, suspected by some to be a carcinogen. A second treatment by helicopter of *Bacillus thuringiensis* (B.t.), a non-chemical compound has not stirred as much controversy in the community.

In all, 250 acres are scheduled for a mid-March spraying. The exact date depends on several variables, including rain and temperature.

Despite the controversy the State Department of Food and Agriculture says the program is safe and vital to the economy of California.

"The gypsy moth is now pretty much contained in the urban area," said John Connell, area manager for the state's plan. "But in Felton it could easily become a forest pest and if it becomes established it could impact agricultural lands."

Connell contends treatment of the gypsy moth is crucial at the initial stage because of the pest's reputation as a "notorious hitchhiker." In its caterpillar or splotchy-egg state the gypsy moth has been found in wheel wells and on camper lids entering the area from the east or from Oregon, where gypsy moth infestation has occurred.

Because of the small area

being sprayed, the door-to-door notification and the "very diluted" levels of carbaryl Connell says Felton residents have nothing to worry about.

But fifth district Supervisor Joe Cucchiara says the use of carbaryl is overkill. He has pledged support to any citizen effort to halt the ground spraying of the insecticide.

"We need some treatment but the application of carbaryl is not necessary," said Cucchiara. "In other infested states the concern for a balance between public health and eradication of the moth has been answered with the use of B.t. only."

Hoping to avoid a rerun of the 1981 experience with the Mediterranean fruit fly, the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau stands behind the state plan.

"Even though the gypsy moth has only been found in the north county area, it could affect us in Watsonville," said Jess Brown, manager of the County Farm Bureau. "We don't want a repeat of the experience we had with the Medfly when some of our crops were quarantined. There was a lot of confusion about the Medfly even though none were found in South County."

Compared to the Medfly scare the gypsy moth alert is much smaller. The area sprayed for the Medfly in 1981 included hundreds of square miles in the region, whereas the proposed treatment of the gypsy moth covers less than half a square mile.

Some Felton residents believe the Medfly sprayings hurt the health of area residents and claim some deaths can be linked to the spraying of malathion.

David Bernick, a Felton resident spearheading the drive to ban the use of carbaryl, hopes to influence the Board of Supervisors to file a lawsuit.