

Friday, June 30, 2006

A patch to quit mosquitoes

Philadelphia Business Journal - by [Athena D. Merritt](#) Staff Writer

Some 200 different species of mosquitoes exist in the United States, growing from egg to adulthood in as little as four days, and lured by scent up to 35 meters away.

Boarding his boat in New Jersey, David Webster, CEO of **AgraCo Technologies International LLC**, puts on a tiny, clear patch, and doesn't give the marauding bloodsuckers a second thought.

The patch, which resembles those worn by smokers trying to break their habit, is the latest product to roll out of the Lafayette Hill company. When placed on two to three hours before going outdoors, Webster says it will keep mosquitoes, gnats and flies away without the use of any chemicals or pesticides.

"We look at this as a safe alternative to heavy pesticides, chemicals or pesky oils," Webster said of the patch. AgraCo also provides the agricultural and food industries with products such as nontoxic fly traps, microbial fertilizers and ethylene removal systems that extend the shelf life of fruits and vegetables.

The patch contains 300 mg of thiamine B1 of which between 50 mg to 75 mg is generally absorbed by a person's body. The excess is excreted through a person's sweat glands, a scent which serves as a repellent to mosquitoes, gnats and flies, Webster said.

When worn for 24 hours, the waterproof patch provides 36 hours of protection. From soldiers to children, the patch offers natural protection from what can be far more than a summertime annoyance, Webster said.

"Not only are mosquitoes a nuisance, but it's a major health problem in developing areas. They carry malaria and other diseases," said Webster, who used the patches for protection on recent trips to South Africa and the U.S. Virgin Islands. "We think it has tremendous value because it is nontoxic -- a lot of people don't want to put Deet spray on children or themselves."

Closer to home, mosquitoes carry the threat of the deadly West Nile virus, Webster said. In 2004, two of the 15 Pennsylvanians who contracted the virus died, according to the Governor's Office. Last year, 25 state residents contracted the disease, but no deaths were attributed to it. In March, Gov. Ed Rendell proposed \$5.4 million in funding to help the state's counties set up effective monitoring and control programs.

AgraCo has struck deals for the product to be placed on store shelves in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and parts of New York, in such stores as **Clemens Markets, Five Below**, Ace True Value and negotiations are under way with others, Webster said. AgraCo plans a nationwide roll out this year, with a worldwide launch to follow.

"They are in all of our stores right now," said Lisa Romain, marketing manager for Five Below, which has 48 stores in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia. "People are definitely interested, and they are responding really well."

The patches retail for between \$2.29 and \$2.99 for a packet of two.

amerritt@bizjournals.com /

215-238-5149