



The Place To Be

Media release

From the Minister for Agriculture

Thursday, 27 November, 2008

HOLIDAY DRIVERS URGED TO BE AWARE OF LOCUST SWARMS

The Brumby Government is urging Victorians to know how to prepare for and respond to a locust swarm while driving this summer.

Agriculture Minister Joe Helper said although infestations of Australian Plague Locusts have occurred mainly in the northern Victorian region to date, adult flying locust swarms can migrate many hundreds of kilometres given the right weather and wind conditions.

Mr Helper said swarms had been sighted in parts of Northern Victoria and in the New South Wales regions of Condobolin, Narrandera and the southern Forbes area.

“A driver’s ability to see the road and oncoming traffic can be significantly reduced by locust swarms,” Mr Helper said.

“Driving through locust swarms can also block radiators, causing vehicles to overheat.

“To help Victorians prepare for a safe holiday season on the road, the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) and the RACV have developed a set of useful safety tips for drivers.

“By taking these precautionary safety steps, motorists can significantly improve their safety while driving through locust swarms this Christmas and summer period.”

Mr Helper said the DPI had worked diligently to minimise the impact of any locust plague into Victoria.

“From early October we began operating from an Incident Control Centre at Tatura and there has been more than 18,000 man hours employed trying to minimise the impact of more than 500 sightings of locusts confirmed as Australian Plague Locusts by DPI entomologists,” he said.

“The Brumby Government will continue to combine efforts with landholders and the community to control the outbreak as much as possible.”

RACV Chief Engineer – Vehicles Michael Case said it was likely most Melburnians would never have experienced a locust swarm and would be in the dark as how best to cope.

“While locusts have an inherent capacity enabling them to fly in massive numbers without colliding with one another, they are not so smart when it comes to avoiding vehicles,” Mr Case said.

“Locusts fly both at day and night and generally at a low altitude, and as their fat-laden bodies can measure up to 42mm, when they impact on a windscreen they literally explode.

“This leaves a sticky residue that may render windscreen wipers useless and can very quickly obscure a driver’s vision. This presents a potentially dangerous scenario, especially for motorists driving into a swarm at night on a country road where the speed limit is 100km/h.”

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For more information, further safety tips or to report locust sightings please contact the Locust Hotline on 1300 135 559 or visit the website www.dpi.vic.gov.au/locusts

MOTORING SAFETY TIPS

Before you leave home:

- Consider attaching an insect screen on your external radiator air-inlet for extra protection;
- Pack a bag with spare water and extra insect cleaning agent and cloths/rags; and
- Check the Department of Primary Industries website for the latest Australian Plague Locusts update: www.dpi.vic.gov.au/locusts or call the Locust Hotline: 1300 13 5559.

Driving through a swarm of Australian plague locusts

- If visibility is somewhat impaired due to locust swarms:
- Slow down – gradually reduce your speed and continue driving carefully;
- Turn on your headlights – to alert oncoming traffic of your presence;
- Be aware that traffic coming from the opposite direction will also have reduced visibility;
- Use your windscreen wipers to clear locusts from your windscreen - well-fed locusts leave a residue of body parts and fat at the point of impact; and
- Monitor temperature gauge on your dashboard – dead locusts can reduce air flow to an engine and cause overheating.