



Sterile Insect Technique: A Proven Tool for Fighting New World Screwworm

New World screwworm (NWS) is a serious pest that affects livestock, pets, wildlife, and, less commonly, people and birds.

USDA has previously eradicated screwworm from the United States using a proven combination of surveillance, animal movement controls, sterile insect releases, and public outreach.

Sterile Insect Technique

Sterile insect technique (SIT) is a proven method for preventing the spread of NWS and protecting American agriculture and natural resources. Female NWS flies only mate once in their lifetime. When they mate with a sterile male, they lay unfertilized eggs that don't hatch.

By releasing sterile flies just outside affected areas, we help ensure flies moving into new areas will only encounter sterile mates and cannot reproduce. When combined with surveillance, movement restrictions, and education and outreach, SIT is a highly effective tool for controlling and eradicating NWS.

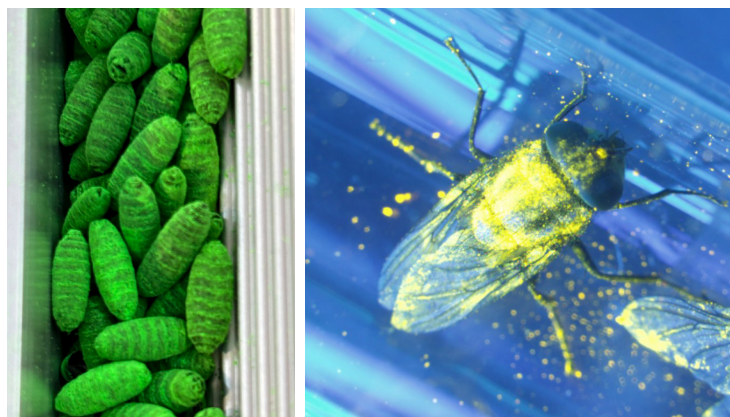
Sterile Insect Technique Is Safe

Releasing sterile flies is safe, environmentally friendly, and provides a sustainable, nontoxic alternative to chemical pesticides. Because only NWS larvae—not the adult flies—cause harm to animals, and sterile flies do not produce larvae, this approach poses no risk to wildlife, livestock, or people.

Dyed Flies

Because surveillance must continue in areas where sterile flies are released, **sterile NWS flies may be caught in traps or reported by the public.** To help officials distinguish sterile flies from wild flies, USDA dyes the sterile pupae. The dye transfers to the adult flies when they emerge.

The fluorescent dye glows under UV light and may also be visible to the naked eye. If a sterile fly is captured in a trap, this dye allows animal health officials to quickly identify it and rule it out as a threat.



Dyed sterile NWS pupae (left); sterile NWS fly glowing under UV light (right)

What To Look For

Check your animals regularly for signs of NWS infestation, including:

- Larvae (maggots) and eggs in or around body openings such as the nose, ears, and genital areas, or the navel of newborn animals
- Draining or enlarging wounds
- Foul odor or the smell of decay
- Signs of pain such as irritated behavior, depression, not eating, or isolating from other animals or people

Shouldn't I look for NWS flies?

Many fly species look similar, so seeing a fly is not cause for concern. Even if you see an NWS fly, it may be a sterile one released to support eradication efforts. Instead of looking for flies, we encourage people to focus on preventing NWS and checking their animals regularly for any signs of infestation.

How To Report

Immediately report anything suspicious to your State animal health official or [USDA Area Veterinarian in Charge](#).

Although screwworm in people is rare, if you notice a suspicious lesion on your body or suspect you may have been exposed, seek medical attention right away.