FEDERAL COORDINATING OFFICE
federal emergency management agency

MOUNT ST. HELENS
TECHNICAL INFORMATION NETWORK

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BULLETIN #5 - "Volcanic Ash Could Reduce Insect Populations...Temporarily

Volcanic ash fallout from Mt.St.Helens could have at least one positive side effect.

It possibly could lead to reduced insect populations, at least temporarily, according to entomologists at Washington State University. Unfortunately, beneficial insects as well as pests are being affected by the ash.

The ash apparently acts like a gigantic application of a physical insecticide, says Dr. Edward Klostermeyer, acting chairman of the WSU entomology department.

The ash apparently scars the cuticle, the insect's waxy body covering. Once this covering is scarred, the insect can't control its internal water balance. It apparently dries up and dies.

Applications of diatomaceous earth are used in the same way to control household pests, such as cockroaches. Pests, unfortunately, are not the only insects affected by the ashfall.

Klostermeyer lost an entire colony of orchard mason bees that he was trying to develop as pollinators for orchards. "They went out Monday morning to forage and did not come back."

Checks of honeybee colonies at the university have revealed "fair" numbers of dead bees outside, but fewer than are killed sometimes by applications of pesticides.

Fortunately, orchards in central Washington had been pollinated before Mt.St.Helens blew its top. According to Dr.Carl A. Johansen, WSU's authority on bees, hives had just been pulled out of the orchards.

"But," he adds, "even if you kill the entire field force, it only sets them back a few weeks. They can recover."

He foresees no effect on production of honey. Major nectar flows

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