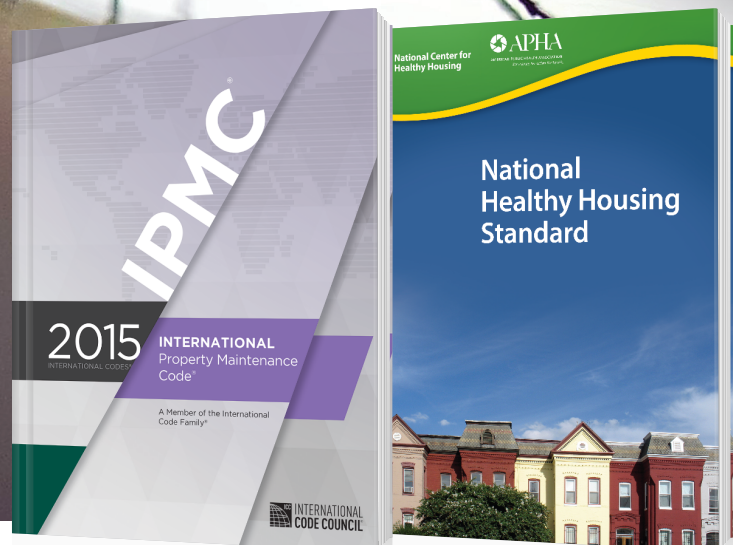


# THE ZIKA VIRUS:

## Mitigation through the enforcement of the International Property Maintenance Code



### Introduction:

The spread of the Zika virus has become a primary concern to health officials in the United States. The Zika virus disease spreads to people primarily through the bite of an infected mosquito. The symptoms include fever, rash, joint pain, and conjunctivitis. The illness lasts several days to a week and does not make people sick enough to go to a hospital. The real danger of this disease is to pregnant women. The Zika virus can cause microcephaly, a medical condition in which the circumference of the head is smaller than normal that is associated with severe fetal brain defects. There is still much the scientific and medical communities have to learn about the effects of the Zika virus, and we must take measures to protect ourselves and our environment.

How can a local jurisdiction assist in mitigating the spread of the Zika virus? The health departments and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta can provide public alerts and public education. Local jurisdictions can provide mosquito control. What else can be done?

### The International Property Maintenance Code:

Local jurisdictions can contribute to the mitigation of this virus by adopting and enforcing the International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC). The provisions in Chapter 3 of the most current edition of the IPMC (2015), when enforced by local jurisdictions, can assist in the slowing down of the spread of this virus (and other infectious diseases) by requiring

property owners meet certain minimum standards in the upkeep of their property. The provisions of this code apply to both residential and commercial structures.

For example, section 304.14 specifically addresses insect screens. In part, this subsection states “every door, window and other outside opening required for ventilation of habitable rooms, food preparation areas, food service areas, or any areas where products to be included or utilized in food for human consumption are processed, manufactured, packaged or stored, shall be supplied with approved tightly fitting screens of not less than 16 mesh per square inch and every swinging door shall have a self closing device in good working condition.”

Other provisions of the IPMC are also useful to local jurisdictions. Several sections of the IPMC give local jurisdictions the enforcement tools they need in order to require property owners to clean up unsanitary conditions including stagnant water on their property that harbor the growth and proliferation of the mosquito population. Section 301.3 deals with vacant structures and land, requiring that these properties not “cause a blighting problem or adversely affect the public health and safety.” Section 302.2, which addresses grading and drainage, states, “Premises shall be graded and maintained to prevent the erosion of soil and to prevent the accumulation of stagnant water thereon, or within any structure located thereon.” Other sections dealing with the accumulation of water include Section 304.1.1, Item #8, and Section 304.7 that contain maintenance and repair requirements for roof surfaces with inadequate drainage and defective roofing components that allow moisture intrusion. Lastly, Section 302.4 addresses weeds and excessive plant growth.

### **The National Healthy Housing Standard:**

Communities may also wish to supplement the IPMC model code with applicable provisions from the National Healthy Housing Standard (NHHS). The NHHS was published in 2014 by the National Center for Healthy Housing (NCHH) and the American Public Health Association (APHA). The NHHS includes health-based provisions

to complement the IPMC and other housing maintenance codes and requirements already in use by local and state governments and federal agencies.

For example, the NHHS encourages the use of integrated pest management (IPM) to address sources of pests first and thus eliminate or at least reduce the use of pesticides in residential properties and communities. This protects against unnecessary exposure to pesticides while still protecting against and eliminating pests transmitting diseases. Section 6.3.5 states, “Pest infestation and the underlying cause shall be eliminated using control methods consistent with Integrated Pest Management (IPM), such as exclusion, sanitation, and least-risk pesticides scaled to and designed for the targeted infestation.” Further, Section 7.6 states: “Pesticides shall only be used in accordance with IPM methods discussed in Section 6.3, using the least toxic pesticide with demonstrated efficacy for the identified pest.” The City of Tukwila, WA, is an example of a community that has adopted these sections as part of their property maintenance code.

### **How can a local jurisdiction find out more about the Property Maintenance Code and the National Healthy Housing Standard?**

The International Code Council (ICC) publishes the International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC).

The IPMC is in use or adopted in 35 states and in the District of Columbia. The National Center for Healthy Housing publishes the National Healthy Housing Standard.

However, local jurisdictions should be mindful that their individual state laws will dictate how and if the property codes can be adopted in their jurisdiction. Local jurisdictions need to consult with their city or county attorneys in order to make sure that the IPMC, or the provisions of chapter three of the IPMC, are properly adopted.

### **Conclusion:**

Local jurisdictions have a powerful and useful tool in the IPMC and the supplemental NHHS to assist in the fight against the Zika virus. Working in conjunction with local health departments, they can help ensure the health and safety of their communities.

### **National Center for HEALTHY HOUSING**

The National Healthy Housing Standard is available here: <https://nchh.org/tools-and-data/housing-code-tools/national-healthy-housing-standard/>



The 2018 IPMC is available here: <http://shop.iccsafe.org/codes/2018-international-codes-and-references/2018-international-property-maintenance-code.html>