



MINISTRY OF HEALTH

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT ON THE EXISTENCE OF INSECTS WHICH
APPEAR TO BE DANGEROUS TO HUMAN AND ANIMAL LIFE ALONG
GREAT EAST ROAD**

1st December 2015

Introduction

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for granting me this opportunity to update the House and the Nation at large on the reported presence of insects suspected to pose a danger to both Human and animal life along the Great East Road between Kacholola and Luangwa Bridge - Eastern Province.

Mr. Speaker, following a question raised by the Hon. Member of Parliament for Chipata Central my ministry carried out an investigation to ascertain the existence of these insects and what their impact was on people and livestock.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to confirm the existence of the said insects in Nyimba especially between Kacholola area and Luangwa River. The insects are now concentrated in the valley areas about 10 -15 km from the main road which is their natural habitat.

Mr. Speaker, the insects are most prevalent in the hot season especially between September and December every year and disappear when the rains begin. The insects have been prevalent in the area for more than 10 years and there is no record that they cause any disease to humans apart from the irritation they cause on the bite site.

There has been an increase in the number of bites and the insect population observed this year. This could be attributed to:

1. Climate change

2. The road construction which has disturbed their habitat in the soil due to excavation and movement of soils coupled with the noise vibrations from the construction equipment.

However, in the past month, there have been no reported cases of bites and sight of the insects along the road.

Description of the insect species

Mr. Speaker the insects are small measuring about 2 mm with 2 pairs of light brown coloured wings with dark spots and brown veins. The (Pronotum) i.e. the hard part of the insect between the head and the abdomen has several pit-like structures and has a light brown band near the head then dark band in the middle and light brown at the end. The insect also has a hard triangular bony like scale in the middle part of its body (scutellum). The body is dark with legs that are dark and light brown. The insects stayed active more than 48 hours after being collected in plastic bottles. They had the following characteristics which formed the basis for their preliminary classification:

1. X-shaped design on the back when the wings are at rest
2. Sucking mouthparts (for piercing plant and animal tissue)
3. Hardened gula (the underside of the head)

4. Antennae have four segments and long
5. Compound eyes present
6. Pronounced pronotum and distinct triangular scutellum on the mesothorax between the bases of the forewings

Mr. Speaker, based on the above characteristics these insects can be classified in the Order Hemiptera which includes true bugs, aphids, leafhoppers and relatives. This group is divided into two large suborders: Heteroptera (true bugs) and Homoptera (aphids, leafhoppers, and relatives). The sample of insects falls under the suborder Heteroptera.

Harmful aspects of Heteropterans

Mr. Speaker, Heteropterans can affect humans in several ways. They are common household pests and can spoil the taste of some fruits (e.g., raspberries contaminated by stinkbugs). But more importantly, some can attack people directly and inflict painful bites as well as introduce disease-causing organisms. After a bite, a blister like lesion develops due to scratching. The injection of saliva or poison may cause allergic reactions in susceptible persons.

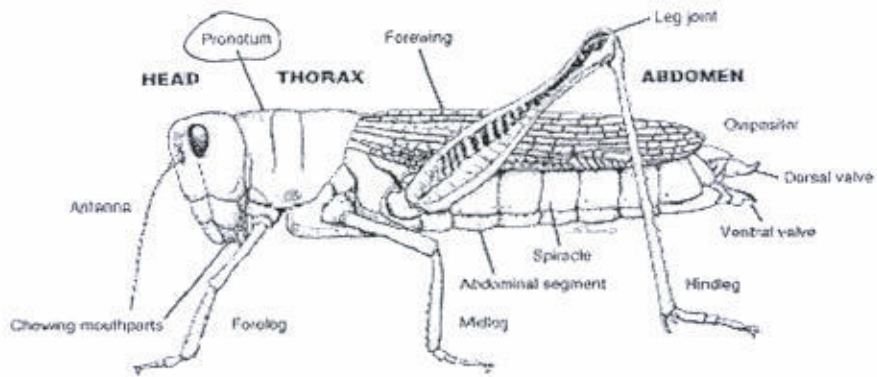
Mr. Speaker, no serious effect has been observed so far except that the victims develop an itching sensation and a blister like rash that forms on the site of bite due to scratching.

What measures the government is taking

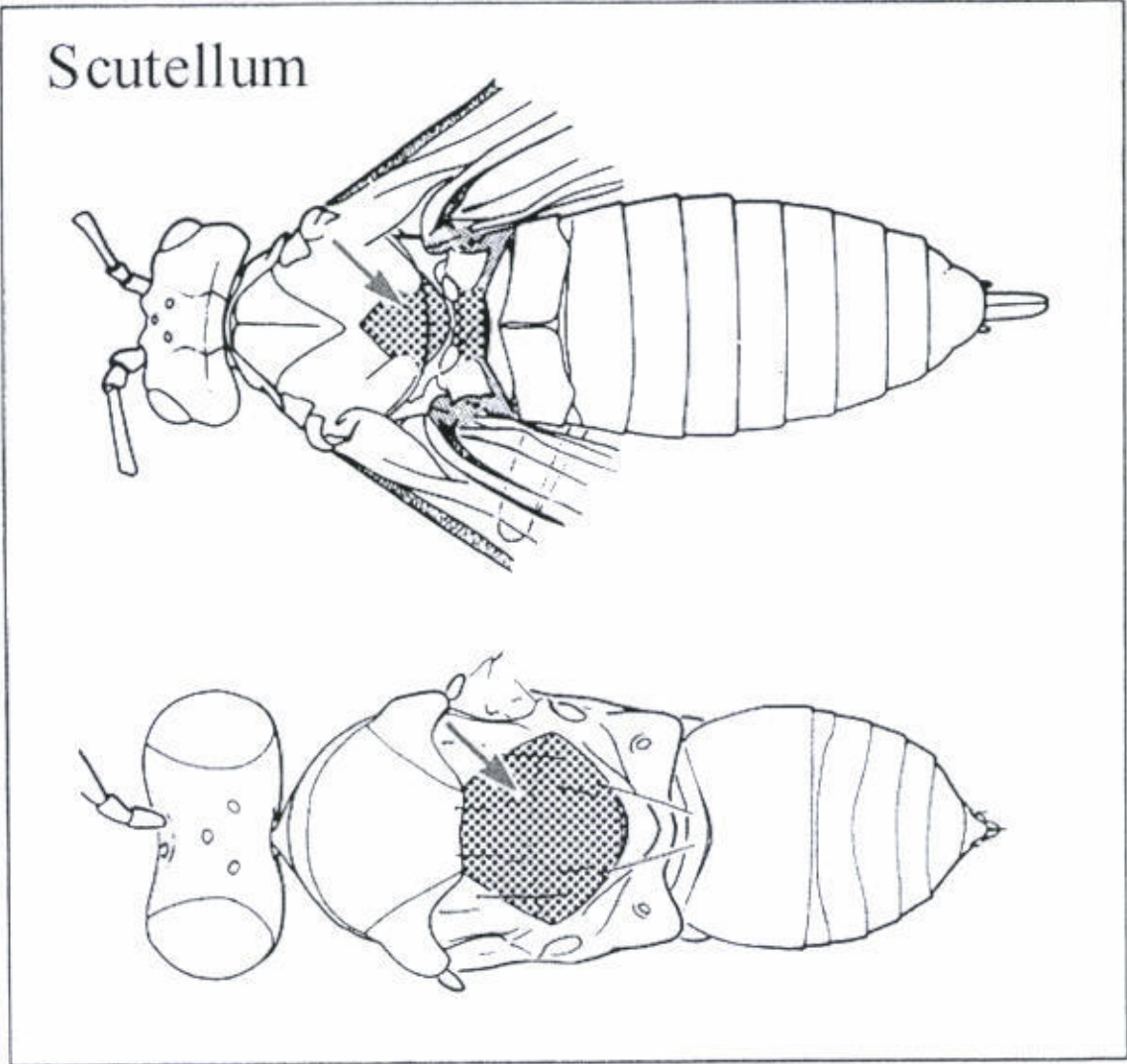
- A team of experts from the veterinary and health department was constituted to assess whether these insects have a long term effect on the health of humans and the animals
- Health facilities are providing standard case management for the victims.
- The community has been sensitized and encouraged to use repellants (especially the road contractors that have been mostly affected).
- Test results received from the veterinary department indicate that the insects do not carry any disease causing organisms that could transmit to either animals or humans.

Mr. Speaker, I thank You

The **pronotum** is a prominent plate-like structure that covers all or part of the thorax or chest of some insects.



The **scutellum** is a shield like appearance bony scale found on the thorax or chest of some insects



Classical features of the insect.

