

LOCAL

Conference to address migrant worker health

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North County academics, health workers will discuss local challenges

Local health officials and academics will address a conference on migrant farm-worker health concerns, including AIDS prevention, access to services and natural disaster emergency response.

The three-day 18th annual Western Migrant Stream Forum begins Friday and will be held at the Del Mar Hilton hotel. It will bring to-

gether health workers from throughout the western U.S. who provide health care to farmworkers for a dialogue on how to improve access and discuss ways to overcome barriers, organizers said.

"It's a really great opportunity for folks that are involved in migrant health care and similar issues to come together and strategize," said Seth Doyle, a

migrant health coordinator with the Northwest Regional Primary Care Association, which organized the conference.

San Diego County is an ideal setting for the conference because of its considerable agricultural industry, Doyle said. Agriculture is one of the top industries in the county, generating \$1.4 billion a year and employing an estimated 24,500 workers.

Many of those workers are immigrants from Mexico and Central America, some of whom are illegal immigrants and live in poverty in substandard housing in North County. Those conditions present problems in delivering adequate health care, local migrant worker activists say.

Among the dozens of lectures, several presenters were recruited from local

organizations, clinics and universities.

Enrique Morones, who heads the migrant rights group Border Angels, will address the conference Friday. His group helps organize Sunday outings to local migrant camps to deliver food, religious services and health screenings to workers.

Critics often blame

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awareness education to the Latino community and farmworkers in North County.

Registration for the conference starts Friday at 7 a.m. The cost is \$270 per person, students pay \$100. For more information visit www.nwrp.ca.org.

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were affected by the 2007 wildfires, which scorched 1,700 homes and killed 10 people.

The report raised concerns about inadequate evacuation procedures for farmworkers and the lack of access to emergency relief.

Ana Palomo, a project coordinator at the Vista Community Clinic, said she will speak at the conference about a program that provides HIV/AIDS

"The undocumented workers contribute billions to the economy of this country and people need to know that," Morones said.

Other local speakers include Konane Martinez and Arcela Nunez-Alvarez, two researchers with the Cal State San Marcos-based National Latino Research Center. They will discuss a report they wrote on how local farmworkers

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undocumented workers for the increasing cost of health care in California and in the nation. But Morones said that the contributions migrant workers make to the country's economy is often undervalued.