

Keys mosquito district plans new control project

FREE PRESS STAFF

MONROE COUNTY — The Florida Keys Mosquito Control District will again be putting a cutting-edge mosquito control technique to work this summer when it releases Wolbachia-infected male *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes

as a means to lower the population of that species within three 20-acre release locations.

According to a news release from FKMCD, this particular technique, developed by vendor



MosquitoMate, has been approved for commercial use by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

Wolbachia is a naturally occurring bacterium that affects reproduction in some mosquito species including the *Aedes aegypti*.

"Protecting public health is one of the main goals of our district, which is why the development of these novel technologies is so important," FKMCD Executive Director Andrea Leal said.

As part of this project, in early June, FKMCD technicians will begin releasing a limited number of Wolbachia-infected male *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes in targeted locations on Key Largo, Plantation Key and Key Colony Beach.

Male mosquitoes do not bite, and when they mate with local female *Aedes aegypti* in the vicinity, the resulting eggs do not hatch, reducing the number of adult mosquitoes.

Aedes aegypti mosquitoes thrive in urban areas around humans and

are the primary carrier of several diseases including yellow fever, dengue fever and Zika.

The Wolbachia males will be prepared and shipped to the Florida Keys from a MosquitoMate facility in Kentucky.

The Florida Keys Mosquito Control District and its board have been pursuing long-term alternatives to pesticides, which are beginning to lose effectiveness against certain species mosquito species such as the *Aedes aegypti*, according to FKMCD Public Information Officer Chad Huff.

FKMCD has previously examined and worked with other control measures that use the mosquito itself as a mode of control.

In 2022, FKMCD and Oxitec released male *Aedes aegypti* that were genetically manipulated to reduce offspring. The Oxitec releases and trial came to a close in 2024.

The EPA is still



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evaluating the Oxitec product for potential registration and expanded use.

The FKMCD's mission is to protect the public from health threats and nuisance issues that impact the local economy by using control methods that are efficient, effective and environmentally sensitive.

For more information about MosquitoMate, visit mosquitomate.com.

For more information about the Florida Keys Mosquito Control District, visit keysmosquito.org.