

# Oxitec Releases First Genetically Modified Mosquitoes in the U.S

Oxitec, the biotech firm released the first round of genetically modified mosquitoes at the end of April. This is the first time in the U.S that genetically modified mosquitoes have been released.

Previously the modified *Aedes aegypti* modified mosquitoes have been released in Brazil, the Cayman Islands, Panama, and Malaysia. *A. aegypti* mosquito populations were said to drop by at least 90% in those locations. In the U.S, the mosquitoes were released in the Florida Keys.

*A. aegypti* mosquitoes carry diseases like Zika and yellow fever. The genetically modified mosquitoes are all male and are engineered with a lethal gene that is passed on to offspring when the genetically modified mosquitoes mate with females. The lethal gene prevents female mosquitoes from developing an essential protein and causes them to die before reaching maturity. Only female mosquitoes bite people, as males exclusively drink nectar.

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*The company will capture mosquitoes throughout the trial to observe how far the insects travel from their boxes, how long they live and whether female mosquitoes are actually picking up the lethal gene and dying off. To make it easier to track the modified mosquitoes, Oxitec introduced a gene that causes the mosquitoes to glow under a specific color of light.*

*The First Genetically Modified Mosquitoes Have Just Been Released in The US*

Releasing genetically modified mosquitoes is suppose to serve as an alternative to spraying with pesticides to control the population. Currently, the Florida Keys Mosquito Control District budgets a million dollars a year to control the mosquitoes by spraying aerial insecticides.