

Debate ramps up on release of genetically engineered mosquitoes in Key West

In this bite-size community near Key West, like so many other mosquito-plagued spots up and down the Florida Keys, residents long ago made peace with insecticides dropped into town by planes or rumbling by on trucks.

But Keys residents are far less enamored of another approach to mosquito control — a proposal to release the nation's first genetically modified mosquitoes, hatched in a lab and pumped with synthetic DNA to try to combat two painful mosquito-borne viral diseases, [dengue](#) and [chikungunya](#).

If the federal Food and Drug Administration gives the go-ahead for the trial, Key Haven, with 444 houses built on a tiny peninsula, would become the focal point of the first American release of several million mosquitoes genetically altered by [Oxitec](#), a British biotechnology company.

Trying to unleash a better weapon to curb dengue, which [hit Key West](#) in 2009 and 2010, and chikungunya is a smart preventive, said Michael S. Doyle, the executive director of the mosquito control district, which invited Oxitec to conduct the trial.

Phil Lounibos, a University of Florida professor of ecology and behavior, said the risks, in general, were “very, very low.” But, he added, “we don’t know all the answers, and Oxitec could do a better job of explaining it.”

Still, residents say, a trial is an experiment.

“This is not the way to protect our community, with an unproven and unprecedented experiment in the Florida Keys,” said Meagan Hull, a Key West resident. “The genie will be out of the bottle, and you can’t stuff it back in.”

Read full, original article: [A Mosquito Solution \(More Mosquitoes\) Raises Heat in Florida Keys](#)