



OFFICE OF THE  
**PREMIER**  
CAYMAN ISLANDS GOVERNMENT

**Announcement of MRCU and Oxitec partnership to control  
the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito.**

**By Premier Hon. Alden McLaughlin, MBE, JP, MLA**

**Thursday, 5 May, 2016s**

**Legislative Assembly**



Premier and Minister for Health Hon. Alden McLaughlin

Madam Speaker,

I am pleased to announce today that the Mosquito Research

and Control Unit (MRCU) has partnered with United Kingdom (UK)-based biotechnology company Oxitec to undertake new mosquito control measures.

Using pioneering science, the project is designed to fight the dangerous *Aedes aegypti* mosquito that spreads Zika, dengue and chikungunya.

Oxitec is a world-leader in the fight against this breed of mosquito and is currently implementing its control solution in Brazil which is, of course, at the epicentre of the present Zika outbreak.

I am very proud to say that the Cayman Islands is the only other country in the world where this programme will be taking place outside of Brazil, and we are once again leading the way in the advancement of mosquito control measures.

While we are no strangers to the occasional case of dengue, and last year we had a few imported cases of chikungunya, we so far remain free of Zika,

Nonetheless, our Public Health Department continues to be vigilant, monitoring the situation regarding Zika and all other infectious diseases.

Zika is of particular concern because of its links to birth defects, including microcephaly, and other medical conditions that are currently being monitored and researched.

Zika has spread rapidly across the Americas and is now in many of our neighbouring countries. On 1<sup>st</sup> February, the World Health Organization declared an international public health emergency.

Then in March, it recommended the implementation of Oxitec's solution to control the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, as part of the global response to the Zika crisis.

We have had an ongoing relationship with Oxitec since 2010 as MRCU has been at the forefront of mosquito-control research. Trials successfully reduced the *Aedes aegypti* by 96 percent in an area of the island where the study was taking place, so we are happy to have now signed an agreement with Oxitec for a new project, which we envisage being the first step in a multi-phase roll-out across Grand Cayman. The timing could not be better as the world faces the Zika epidemic and continued outbreaks of dengue and chikungunya.

Oxitec's pioneering technology produces a genetically engineered non-biting male mosquito that breeds with the disease-transmitting *Aedes aegypti* females. This, in turn, means that offspring inherit a gene which causes them to die before reaching adulthood, ensuring that they do not reproduce.

This is an environmentally friendly approach to curtailing the breed, as no insecticides are necessary.

The control programme will begin in West Bay before being expanded throughout the island, subject to the appropriate approvals and funding.

As part of public education about this important project, staff from MRCU and Oxitec will have an information booth at West Bay dock from now until Saturday, as well as an information desk in West Bay at a location to be announced. Staff will also conduct house-to-house visits in West Bay to inform residents about what is happening. Updated information will be available to residents in the coming weeks.

Madam Speaker, I take this opportunity to acknowledge the continued efforts of the team at MRCU. They sometimes have to work in very difficult conditions but they do an amazing and

very important job in helping to control all mosquito species, including our main disease vector, the *Aedes aegypti*.

I also recognise and applaud the teamwork that takes place between MRCU and Public Health at the Health Services Authority.

As a result of the long-standing pioneering work by MRCU, the Cayman Islands has benefitted from outstanding mosquito control, and the MRCU has a well-deserved reputation of excellence in mosquito control throughout the region.

As we head into CARPHA Mosquito Awareness Week from 9<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> May, it is a good time for us all to remember to play our part, too, by ensuring that we do not leave any standing water in our yards. It is very important that we empty buckets and drums and clean our gutters to eliminate possible breeding areas for mosquitoes.

It is our collective responsibility to unite in the fight against this dangerous insect, which for so many generations past, was the scourge of these islands.

I end by thanking Oxitec for partnering with MRCU on this exciting development in mosquito control which has the potential for far-reaching and long-lasting consequences for world health.

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