

# Sterile Insect Technique (SIT) - Lee County Mosquito Control District

## What is SIT?

- Sterile Insect Technique (SIT) is a technique used to sterilize insects to reduce their populations or to eradicate them. It is insecticide-free.
- It involves releasing lab reared sterilized insects to mate with the wild population to reduce or eliminate the targeted species.
- This method of control can be achieved using irradiation from gamma rays or X-rays.

## Has SIT been used before?

- SIT is not a new technology. In fact, its first use in the United States occurred on Sanibel Island in 1951 to eliminate the Screwworm Fly. Recently, sterile screwworm flies were released to successfully control a localized outbreak in the Florida Keys. Currently, SIT is used in agriculture to control fruit flies as well as the medically-important Tsetse fly, which spreads sleeping sickness pathogens to cattle and humans in Africa.

## How does SIT work in mosquito control?

- Female mosquitoes will only mate with male mosquitoes once in their lifetime. If lab reared sterile male mosquitoes are released into an environment with wild females and they mate, the female mosquitoes will not produce viable offspring. This will reduce or eliminate the local population through successive releases.
- X-rays will be used on mosquito pupae to render them sterile when they reach the adult stage. Sterile males will then be released to mate with wild females.
- Male mosquitoes, unlike females, do not bite. Releasing male sterile mosquitoes will not increase the number of mosquito bites in a particular area.

## Is there any genetic modification with this method of control?

- No. Sterilization is achieved through irradiation and requires no genetic manipulation of the organism. The X-rays used are the same as those used in medical practices.

## Which mosquito will be targeted with the LCMCD's SIT Program?

- The *Aedes aegypti* mosquito will be targeted, an invasive exotic species in our county. This mosquito is a viable vector of the following viruses: Yellow fever, dengue fever, chikungunya, and Zika.
- *Aedes aegypti* is an urban mosquito, meaning it breeds around homes and prefers to feed on humans. They are difficult to control by conventional means (insecticide applications, source reduction) due to their cryptic behavior and daytime biting habits.

### **Will I have a chance to discuss SIT with the District to address my concerns or questions?**

- Yes, the District will provide educational talks, classroom presentations in local schools, town hall meetings, and media interviews to answer questions and explain SIT mosquito releases before they occur next year.

### **When and where will LCMCD be releasing sterile male mosquitoes?**

- The District intends to begin the release of sterile male mosquitoes on Captiva Island in the winter of 2019 when populations are lower due to drier conditions. Captiva is a prime location because of its size and the abundance of *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes.

### **Will any female mosquitoes be released?**

- Male mosquitoes are separated from females prior to release. However, a small number of females may slip through with the large number of males released. These females are no different from the local female population, except that they are sterile.

### **Are there any significant risks to using SIT in Lee County?**

- *Aedes aegypti* is a non-native species that poses a serious public health risk due to the viruses it can carry. The SIT method, if successfully implemented, will significantly reduce the population of this species. There are very few natural predators of this mosquito, due to its preferred breeding habitat (manmade water-holding containers, tires, cans and bottles, rain gutters, etc.). Reducing its population will not have a significant impact on the food chain.

### **Where can I learn more about the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito and our local mosquito control operations?**

- Visit the Lee County Mosquito Control District's website at [www.lcmcd.org](http://www.lcmcd.org) and our Education site at [www.MosquitoEd.com](http://www.MosquitoEd.com).
- You can also find more information from our state and national mosquito control associations: The Florida Mosquito Control Association ([www.floridamosquito.org](http://www.floridamosquito.org)) and the American Mosquito Control Association ([www.mosquito.org](http://www.mosquito.org)).

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