

SPECIAL ADVISORY BULLETIN



Latest Industry Information from the Mulch & Soil Council

March 2, 2006

Formosan Subterranean Termites in Mulch

Internet Message Circulating

Several anonymous messages are circulating the Internet warning consumers about potential termite infested mulch from the New Orleans cleanup after Hurricane Katrina. This message at least infers the information originates from the LSU Ag Center. A sample of one message follows:

----- Sample Internet Message -----

If you are interested in gardening and landscaping, this info could be very helpful. It could possibly save you from a monster headache, and from having to spend a big pile of \$\$\$.

Pass it on to your family and friends. Hopefully, your neighbors will see this, also. If THEY get the problem, -- guess what? YOU'RE next.

I've added a link at the end of this email. I went to Google.com just to read about these nasty critters. Check it out.

*Good luck,
Jack*

If you use mulch around your house be very careful about buying mulch this year. After the hurricane in New Orleans many trees were blown over. These trees were then turned into mulch and the state is trying to get rid of tons and tons of this mulch to any state or company who will come and haul it away. So it will be showing up in Home Depot, Wal-mart and Lowe's at dirt cheap prices with one huge problem; Formosan Termites will be the bonus in many of those bags. New Orleans is one of the few areas in the country where the Formosan Termites has gotten a strong hold and most of the trees blown down were already badly infested with those termites. Now we may have the worst case of transporting a problem to all parts of the country that we have ever had. These termites can eat a house in no time at all and we have no good control against them, so tell your friends that own homes to avoid cheap mulch and know where it came from.

Here's the link:

Click here: [LSU/AgCenter/Formosan Subterranean Termites/Portal](http://LSU/AgCenter/Formosan%20Subterranean%20Termites/Portal)

----- End of Sample Internet Message -----

LSU Response

We contacted Frankie Gould, director of communications at LSU Ag Center, who stated LSU did not issue the message and advises the content is false. LSU intends to issue a disclaimer stating they are not the source of this message.

According to LSU termite expert Dr. Dennis Ring, the Formosan Subterranean Termite was introduced to the U.S. after WWII; so, it has been here over 50 years. The Louisiana Department of Agriculture has a long-standing quarantine in 12 infested parishes (counties), see map attached. No wood or cellulose materials may be moved out of the quarantine areas without LA Ag. Dept. approval, including all materials from Katrina clean-up efforts.

Termites are soft-bodied insects with specific moisture and temperature requirements for survival. The Formosan Subterranean Termite would not survive intense heat or cold and prefers a moist environment at approximately 14°C (57°F).

**Additional
Experts'
Comments:**

Dr. Ronald Shumack, Associate Dean of the College of Agriculture and Head of the Department of Horticulture (Emeritus) at Auburn University confirms that the likelihood of termites surviving in packaged mulch is highly improbable. In a shrink-wrapped pallet of bagged mulch, high temperatures, limited air and diminished moisture represent a hostile environment for termite survival. Through three decades of observation and experience, Dr. Shumack reports no known incidences of termite infestation with packaged mulch products and states, "I am very concerned with the content of this [Internet] message. I have never seen a case where termites have survived the grinding, screening, bagging, palletizing and shipping. The insect would have to live under conditions that are extremely difficult to survive."

Dr. William Fonteno of North Carolina State University agrees. As program director for the Mulch & Soil Council Product Certification Program, Dr. Fonteno inspected over 500 bags of mulch and soil products taken from retail stores in 2005. No products inspected from anywhere in the country had any live insect infestations - not even one bag.

MSC Position

1. Random product testing of mulch products certified by the Council has shown no signs of insect infestation.
2. Katrina clean-up materials referred to in the Internet messages focus on Construction & Demolition wood that would be the most susceptible to termite infestation. No mulch products of C&D wood origin have been certified by the Council.
3. Buying certified mulch products reduces the probability of source materials most susceptible to termite infestation.
4. According to experts, the practical survivability of a soft-bodied insect withstanding the violent environment inside the mulch grinding process or the high temperatures (130°F – 160°F) of mulch storage, packages and pallet stacks is extremely unlikely.

Conclusion

1. The recent Internet messages warning of termite-ridden mulch being exported from the Katrina clean-up area are false and misleading to the gardening industry and the public.
2. The Louisiana Department of Agriculture is aware of the problem and has established a quarantine to prohibit movement of wood materials outside the infested areas.
3. Mulch & Soil Council Product Certification addresses the issues raised. Certification identifies for the public those products least likely to contain materials susceptible to pest infestation and provides random testing to monitor industry compliance.
4. MSC members are advised to require documentation of the source of all raw materials to assure no haulers are violating state quarantine regulations.
5. Lot coding of all mulch products is strongly recommended as a tracking and control method to address potential insect infestation claims.

**Louisiana
Quarantine
Area**

Calcasieu, Cameron, Jefferson, Jefferson Davis, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. John the Baptist, St. Tammany, Tangipahoa and Washington parishes.

**For More
Information
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