

Formosan Termites Swarming; Don't Help Them Spread

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It's the time of the year when Formosan subterranean termites swarm and spread their colonies. It's also a good time to make sure you don't give them any help in spreading now or any time of the year, caution experts with the LSU AgCenter.

"The Formosan subterranean termite is believed to be the most destructive pest in Louisiana and the most important structural pest of the new millennium," says LSU AgCenter entomologist Dr. Dennis Ring.

These termites are estimated to cause more than \$1 billion damage in Louisiana every year – more than \$300 million in New Orleans alone.

The damage from the pest can cause losses because of treatment costs, repair expenses, defaults on loans and even the collapse, demolition and rebuilding of structures.

"Termites move slowly on their own by swarming," Ring explains. "Swarming occurs when the insects fly out of the nest in search of a mate and a site to begin a new colony."

Termites swarm in such large numbers in the New Orleans area during this time of the year they may be referred to as a "Mothers' Day Snow Storm," Ring says.

"There can be so many flying termites around lights that they cause Little League baseball games to be stopped," Ring said, explaining, "Swarms are larger in the port cities like New Orleans and Lake Charles, because Formosan subterranean termites have had more time to build larger colonies."

These destructive pests are believed to have entered the country when they were shipped from East Asia with military cargo following World War II.

When swarms occur, the winged termites can fly up to about 1,700 feet, Ring explains. But an even bigger issue is when humans help them to spread by carrying them longer distances in infested wood products.

"Humans help termites move great distances when they move infested railroad ties, utility poles, lumber, landscaping timbers, potted plants, shipping crates, pallets, mobile homes, paper and other cellulose products," Ring cautions. "Since Formosan subterranean termites commonly build carton nests in the cellulose materials, they can be moved long distances by humans without being noticed."

The pests are believed to have been transported to other areas of the state – particularly northeastern and central Louisiana – by such methods.

As for other methods to reduce the termites' destruction, LSU AgCenter experts say to avoid attracting them onto your property or into your home.

"Do not invite termites in your home by leaving cellulose material and moisture near your home," said Ring. "Remove all wood, cardboard, paper and cellulose-containing material from around the home."

"Also, slope the landscape so water will drain away from the house, and fix dripping outside faucets. This will

reduce the opportunity for termites to start a colony, reproduce and build mud tubes into the home."

The destructive pests were most recently discovered in Pineville – where they are believed to have traveled either in a planter box or on railroad ties. That's why Ring says precautions are essential.

"Do not move cellulose-containing products from infested areas unless the products are carefully inspected and you are sure the products are not infested with this pest," Ring says. "Inspect the products and containers for termites, wood damaged by termites, soil, mud tubes and a carton nest."

Formosan subterranean termites are found in most Louisiana parishes south of and touching I-10 and I-12 and in Beauregard, Vernon, Sabine, Ouachita and now Rapides parishes.

They also are known to infest parts of Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas.

"These termites pose a greater threat than the native species because they form larger colonies, are more aggressive and form carton nests above ground," Ring explains. "Their nests may contain termites that number in the millions. Native termites have smaller colonies."

Sometimes referred to as "supertermites," Formosan subterranean termites can do much more damage in less time because of the larger size of their colonies.

"Formosan subterranean termites' queens can live up to 20 years and lay 2,000 eggs in a day," the LSU AgCenter entomologist explains, adding, "The destructive pests are very aggressive and found in extremely large numbers."

Subterranean termites, like the Formosan, usually enter a building through a mud tube from the soil level. Formosan subterranean termites can build a carton nest in the wall, reproduce at a rapid rate and cause severe damage to the structure before being detected, experts cautions.

"Homeowners need to become very efficient in controlling the infestation of termites in their homes and they can help by controlling the access the pest has to cellulose materials and water near a home," Ring says.

Experts also say citizens need to inspect their homes at least once a year for signs of termites. That includes inspecting a home for mud tubes on the side of the slab around the perimeter of the structure. In addition, inspect areas where moisture is commonly found – behind showers and bath tubs, kitchens, bathrooms, utility rooms and outside faucets. And don't forget to look for sheet rock dust and pin holes in the sheetrock inside the home.

"It is important for homeowners to become educated about the pest, take preventive actions in their homes and communities and stop moving the termite to new locations," Ring stresses.

"Do not spread Formosan subterranean termites," he says. "Everyone needs to help manage this pest."

If Formosan subterranean termites are suspected to have been found, report the infestation to the LSU AgCenter or the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry.

Ring says to submit winged termites and soldiers (termites with large, orange-yellow heads) to the LSU AgCenter parish offices for identification. If specimens of the termites are submitted fresh or stored in 100 percent alcohol, experts may even be able to determine where they originated.

For more information on these pests, contact your parish LSU AgCenter office or visit the Web site at www.lsuagcenter.com and click on the Termites link listed under Features. You also can call Dr. Ring at (225) 578-2180.

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