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NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:

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Termites

It seems as if we have had an abundance of insect pests this year, from heavy infestations of aphids in trees, chinch bugs in lawns and crickets in homes as well as many others. One pest that many homeowners seem to forget about until spring swarming time is the termites. Unfortunately many times the adult stages are confused with large ants or small beetles that may infest homes. Recently, two samples of the termite pests have been submitted to our office for identification. These were in the window sills of the homes.

Termites are the most destructive insect pests of wood in the United States. They cause billions of dollars in damage each year and have a negative impact on a family's most valuable possession --- the home.

In nature termites are beneficial because they break down cellulose into usable nutrients. The biomass resulting from this process is recycled to the soil as humus.

Problems occur when termites attack the wooden elements of homes or other structures built by man. The presence of termites is often not readily noticed because their activity is hidden behind wallboards, siding or wood trim. Homeowners should watch for subterranean termites and take precautions against infestations.

Two major types of subterranean termites are found in Texas. They are the native subterranean termite and Formosan subterranean termite; both are serious threats to wooden structures.

Native subterranean termite species are found throughout the state. Overall, they are considered the most economically important because they are so broadly distributed. The second and increasingly important termite is the introduced Formosan subterranean termite. The Formosan termite is easily transported from one infested area to another in landscape timbers, railroad cross-timbers, mulch and wooden pallets.

Dead trees and brush provide a natural food sources for foraging subterranean termites. When natural vegetation is cleared and houses are built, termites often switch to feeding on wooden structures. Termites enter buildings through wood that is in direct contact with the soil and by building shelter tubes over or through cracks in foundations. Active termite infestations can be difficult to detect. To find out if a home is infected, the structure should be checked for evidence of swarmers (including wings or dead termites in windows), mud tubes or damaged wood inside or around a structure.

Generally, the first sign of infestation homeowners notice is swarming reproductives on windowsills or near indoor lights. Swarming termites inside the house usually indicate an active infestation in the structure.

Mud shelter tubes on crawl space piers, utility penetrations or on foundation walls and slabs are a sign of termite infestation. The soil line should be several inches below the top of slabs or foundation walls. An inspector should look for mud tubes carefully along foundation walls and slabs, especially along cracks, in corners or where the top of the foundation is close to the ground.

Control measures include reducing the potential for termite infestation, preventing entry, using termite bait and applying residual chemicals for preventive or remedial treatment. Although it is possible for a homeowner to perform an inspection, it is recommended that licensed professional inspectors do this work. Pest control professionals can determine the presence of infestations and damage, the need for remedial control measures and the measures to use to eliminate the conditions that encourage termite attacks.

Termite treatment requires specialized drills, pressure injectors, pressure-generating pumps and high capacity tanks. It is advisable, in most cases, to use a pest control specialist as they are familiar with construction principles and practices, have the necessary equipment and know termite biology and habits.

Pesticide License Recertification Training in Overton

Licensed pesticide applicators will have the opportunity to earn five continuing education units at upcoming training sessions on either Nov. 29 or Dec. 4. Both training days will be conducted at the Texas A&M University System Agricultural Research and Extension Center at Overton.

Two of the continuing education units will be integrated pest management; 1 ½ in laws and regulations, and 1 ½ in general.

Though the pesticide applicator program at the Overton Center is usually "standard fare" every year, new topics have been selected to meet the changing needs of agricultural producers, said Dr. Billy Higginbotham, Texas Cooperative Extension fisheries and wildlife specialist.

New topics this year will include information on carbon credits and forest management, weed and brush control in pastures, and what's legal and what's not in feral-hog control.

Higginbotham said some "tried-and-true" topics will also be on the program, including research updates on pasture and livestock management, and a review of laws and regulation relating to pesticide use.

Carbon credits may be the newest topic on the program, Higginbotham said. East Texas landowners are currently being contacted by brokers offering to pay them for signing a contract not to harvest their timber until 2011. It's a legitimate business contract, said Dr. Eric Taylor, Extension forestry expert, but there are both pros and cons about entering a carbon credit contract which landowners need to be aware.

Both training sessions will begin with registration at 7:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. at the Overton center's classroom. The presentations will begin at 8:30 a.m. and end at about 2:15 p.m., with an hour break for lunch at noon.

Participants may attend both the Nov. 29 and Dec. 4 sessions and earn 10 continuing education credits.

Registration for either training will be \$25 per person and includes lunch and refreshments. Registration will be at the door only. Payment may be made either by check, money order or cash.

Additional information is available from the Gregg County Extension office at 903/236-8429

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