NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:

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Chinch Bug Control

The southern chinch bug, is one of the most important insect pests of St. Augustine-grass in Texas. Although the southern chinch bug is a serious pest only on St. Augustine-grass lawns, it occasionally may feed on zoysiagrass, centipedegrass, bahiagrass, or bermudagrass.

Expanding, irregular patches of dead or stunted grass surrounded by a halo of yellowing, dying grass often provide the first clue to the presence of chinch bugs. These islands of dying grass tend to increase in size and merge as insect numbers increase. Damage can develop rapidly, especially in sunny locations during hot, dry weather

Chinch bug damage can be confused with certain lawn diseases or other physiological disorders. Brown patch is a common disease affecting the leaf blades of St. Augustine-grass. Brown patch symptoms, however, usually occur in a circular or semi-circular pattern, as opposed to the irregular-shaped areas of dead and dying grass that result from chinch bug feeding. Chinch bug damage also can be difficult to distinguish from that caused by drought. Detection of significant numbers of the insects themselves is the best proof that chinch bugs are the cause of the damage.

Adult southern chinch bugs are small and slender, 1 /6 to 1 /5 of an inch long. They have black bodies with white wings. Each wing bears a distinctive, triangular black mark. Normally, some of the adults at any given site will have full-sized, functional wings, whereas other individuals will be short-winged and incapable of flight. Chinch bugs are found most readily in the weakened, yellowing grass around a dead spot in the lawn.

Control of chinch bugs starts with proper lawn care. Keeping thatch to a minimum, for example, reduces chinch bug numbers and makes other control methods more effective. Too little or too much water also can cause chinch bug problems. Chinch bugs prefer hot, dry environments. Dry weather enhances survival of chinch bug nymphs and eggs by reducing the incidence of disease.

Also, drought-stressed lawns are more susceptible to chinch bug injury.

St. Augustine-grass lawns should be watched closely during the summer for signs of drought stress. The lawn should be watered immediately when edges of grass blades begin to curl, grass fails to spring back quickly when walked on, or the turf takes on a dull bluish-gray color. Due to the variety of soil types and depths in Texas, the amount of water needed will vary. Whenever possible, apply enough water to wet the soil profile to a depth of approximately 6 inches and let it dry out between irrigations. Frequent watering promotes shallow root systems in St. Augustine-grass, making it more susceptible to injury by chinch bugs.

The first step when using pesticides for chinch bug control is to determine whether a problem truly exists. If your neighborhood is prone to chinch bug problems, inspect your lawn weekly during the spring, summer and fall months. Look for off-color areas, especially in direct sun, and along sidewalks and driveways. When chinch bugs are present in high enough numbers to cause grass to yellow, they can often be found by parting the grass at the edge of affected areas and examining the soil and base of the turf.

An alternative sampling method to simply parting the grass and looking for the insects is the flotation method. A coffee can (with the top and bottom lids removed) should be pushed into the ground with a twisting motion. Use a knife, if necessary, to cut the grass around the rim. Fill the can with water for about 10 minutes and check for chinch bugs as they float to the surface. Action thresholds for samples taken with 4-inch and 6-inch diameter coffee cans are an average of two, and four to five chinch bugs per sample, respectively. Several samples should be taken from different locations in the damaged (not dead) grass Several checks should be made in areas with suspected infestations. When chinch bugs are abundant enough to cause visible damage, insecticide use can prevent further injury. A variety of liquid and granular insecticides is available to control chinch bugs. Granular insecticides can be applied with a standard fertilizer spreader and irrigated lightly (1 /8 to 1 /4 inch of water) to activate the insecticide. Drop-type spreaders are recommended to avoid scattering insecticide granules into gutters, sidewalks and driveways, where the granules can be washed into storm drains and streams. Any granules landing in such sites should be swept up and reapplied properly.

Liquid sprays are usually applied using a hose-end sprayer that can apply 15 to 20 gallons of water per 1,000 square feet. To ensure even coverage, spray back and forth across the same area. Irrigation is not recommended following application of liquid insecticides. Watering the lawn

before application can help the pesticide penetrate into the turf.

Always wear appropriate clothing when applying pesticides. Read the label to see what protective equipment should be worn.. Treated areas should be allowed to dry thoroughly before permitting people or pets to walk or play on the treated grass. Always check the label for information concerning safe re-entry times.