

THE TRUTH ABOUT TERMITES IN MULCH

A widely reported rumor that termite-infested mulch being processed in southern states ravaged by hurricanes Katrina and Rita is winding up on the shelves of nationwide home centers is completely false, according to Dr. Bob Davis, a market development expert for BASF, the manufacturer of leading termite defense products Termidor® and Phantom® termiticides/insecticides.

In recent weeks, an unsubstantiated message has been circling the Internet claiming that trees downed by hurricane winds in states with large infestations of the ultra-destructive Formosan termite are being shredded into mulch that is then sold at extremely low prices to various home centers such as Lowe's and Home Depot. Numerous entomologists and other experts have gone on-record debunking the theory, including Davis.

“The mulching process itself will kill most termites in the wood,” Davis said. “Additionally, two key states—Mississippi and Louisiana—have implemented regulatory procedures to quarantine any green waste, including mulch, from being moved outside of the counties and parishes that were most widely affected by the hurricanes.”

Davis said the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry have also both initiated public awareness campaigns warning against moving green waste outside of the quarantined areas. Additionally, the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) has issued warnings to commercial haulers about transporting potentially-infested materials outside of restricted locations.

According to local officials, most of the green waste resulting from the hurricanes is being burned or buried in nearby landfills. Representatives from the various nationwide garden and home centers have said that the mulch they purchase must meet extremely high standards, and that none of it is purchased from the hurricane-damaged areas.

Still, Davis says, while the Internet rumors are mainly no cause for concern, anything is possible.

“A private citizen unaware of the situation could potentially haul infested material away from one of the coastal areas and dispose of it in an unaffected area,” he said. “People need to be aware of this potential hazard and should leave any green waste in the Gulf Coast right where it is.”

“Of course,” Davis continued, “getting a preventative treatment will protect any structure from becoming infested with termites, regardless of where they come from.”