



# Battling Formosan Subterranean Termites in Alabama

## Impact Statement

### The Problem/Issue:

Twelve Alabama counties have been infested by the Formosan subterranean termite. Records show that the infestations have occurred in and around structures or trees in residential areas, and most are associated with the introduction of used railroad crossties as landscaping timber. Several cases are associated with construction timber obtained from Louisiana. A review of records also shows a clear pattern of the range expansion along main interstate highways, possibly indicating that the spread is aided by human transportation of infested materials. The two gulf coastal counties, Mobile and Baldwin, have the highest number of Formosan termite infestations and where its distribution should be considered widespread posing the greatest threat to consumers. In all inland counties, Formosan subterranean termite infestations occur sporadically, but the number of reported infestations increases each year. The northernmost record is a sample from Jackson County, 325 miles inland. In 2003, a verified, established infestation was recorded in Cullman County 290 miles inland. In January 2003, the mean temperature in that area was 2.11°C with a low of -15.00°C. This infestation represents convincing evidence that Formosan subterranean termites can become well established in areas previously thought uninhabitable in Alabama.

### What's Been Done:

Formosan subterranean termites were first found in Alabama in the 1980s. Since then, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System has been documenting the spread of Formosan subterranean termites by county with the help of research entomologists, the pest management industry, state Department of Agriculture and Industries inspectors, homeowners and the general public.

Extension initiated two series of Formosan subterranean termite awareness educational programs to familiarize Alabama residents with the pest. One train-the-trainer program focused on educating county Extension agents, who, in turn, made the information and educational materials available to clients of each county. Another program, conducted in collaboration with Alabama Pest Control Association, focused on pest management professionals. In addition, publications on termite biology and management methods were developed and disseminated to homeowners and residents statewide.

Alabama residents and professional pest control operators were encouraged to report termite occurrences and

send samples to local Extension offices or Extension specialists at Auburn University for identification. Auburn University's Plant Diagnostic Laboratory identified samples submitted by county Extension agents and the public. Then Extension specialist verified all cases and samples and provided management recommendations. Since 2001, intensive field collections have been made in cooperation with county Extension agents and pest management professionals in counties with Formosan subterranean termite records.

In 2003, Fairhope City in Baldwin County sponsored the Formosan Termite Watch Program to estimate current distribution of Formosan subterranean termites within the city limits. This program integrated a sticky trap collection program and surveillance through public relations activities. Volunteers positioned sticky traps near light sources at 109 locations throughout the city. Traps were replaced every other week from May through July and sent to the Extension System for examination.

## **Why We Care:**

The distribution of the Formosan subterranean termite has been rapidly expanding in Alabama. Our educational programs have had positive impact on public awareness of this termite. Our clients are serving as a public surveillance tool and helping update researchers on the expansion of this termite.

The Fairhope City Formosan Termite Watch Program revealed in 2003 that about 70 percent of selected areas throughout the city are infested by Formosan subterranean termites. Some of the sticky cards were covered with more than 200 Formosan termite alates indicating the termite population is large or cards were very near a swarm site. Extension identified 73 termite sites and evaluated termite infestation levels and expansion potential. Residents were informed of the program's progress through news media and public meetings. Many residents learned more about the extent of termite problems and gained the knowledge to win the battle against termites.