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## 'The most destructive termite in the world'

Formosans can thrive in debris

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**POPLARVILLE** - Inside a yellow warehouse behind Poplarville's Mississippi State University Extension Office, Margaret Lockwood finished mixing a green solution that resembled swamp water in a clear glass beaker.

She sealed the container with tape and foil for the next day's experiment. The research team, of which she was a member, would find if the killer fungus that tinted the liquid green would be able to halt the march of one of the Coast's most destructive animal invaders, the Formosan subterranean termite.

The experiment taking place in Poplarville is one of several approaches to combating the Formosan, an imported species of termite from Southeast Asia that the project's lead researcher at MSU, Jian-Zhong Sun, called "the most destructive termite in the world."

Other groups involved in the fight are looking to amend state laws to cut into the estimated \$1.5 billion of damage that the termites cause nationally every year.

An MSU study found that one colony of Formosans can eat up to 1,000 pounds of wood a year, compared to the 7 pounds that native termites eat, while researchers at the University of Hawaii concluded that a single colony could eat the whole structure of a home within two years.

The highly social insect has invaded nine Southern states, California and Hawaii, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. They have been found in 25 Mississippi counties, including the six coastal counties, 14 Alabama counties and 34 of Louisiana's parishes.

Sun said that a single colony could hold up to 10 million termites and that 1 million-member colonies are commonly found inside buildings.

He said that the largest Formosan colony found in America had infested a public library in Algiers, La. It weighed 600 pounds and contained 70 million termites.

Official concern about the spread of the aggressive and voracious insects prompted Mississippi's Department of Agriculture and Commerce to adopt a quarantine order called Rule 40 in 2002. The law makes it illegal to move railroad cross ties, utility poles or any other wood products that have made contact with the ground from any of the 25 infested counties.

Newport Partners, a building industry consulting company that is working to have the Mississippi Legislature adopt stricter building codes, is pushing two separate bills. One includes termite protection.

The Senate bill would mandate adopting international building standards statewide. The one in the House would be stricter, but apply only to the coastal counties. It has language that would require builders to use termite resistant materials.

Mike Moore, a project engineer with Newport Partners, said that his group likes the stricter termite controls in the House bill, though it would not add statewide requirements.

"Once people see that these (coastal) counties are building better homes with more stringent standards, it will hopefully have a domino effect for the rest of the state," he said. "Either one is going to increase termite protection."

He said that reinforcing building codes through state legislation is nothing new.

"This is all coming from other states looking at what Florida successfully did to strengthen their building codes after Hurricane Andrew in 1992," Moore said. "We are looking at the Formosan as the Andrew in these infested Southern states."

### **What to look for**

Mud tubes on outside walls.

Soft spots on walls.

Swarming termites with wings coming from within buildings. Formosans swarm from April to June, roughly between 7 and 10 p.m.

The difference between ants and termites: Ants have a pinched or tapered waist, termites have no waist.

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### ***Disaster recovery in a Formosan world***

*Do not move termites or provide them with food.*

- *Pick up debris around your house quickly. Rotting wood releases substances that actually attract termites.*
- *Wood removed from damaged buildings should be inspected and disposed of immediately, as it could be infested. Do not bury it, even if it is treated. It will become a food source.*
- *Any salvaged wood that you are saving should be stored off the ground and away from your house. Do not transport it, except to an authorized disposal facility.*
- *Call in a professional inspector and exterminator.*
- *When rebuilding, use termite-resistant building materials, especially for load-bearing parts of the structure. Use treated wood, steel, concrete or masonry.*
- *Use termiticides appropriately inside the structure and as a barrier around the house.*

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