



PROTECT YOUR HOMES FROM FLYING TERMITES

Preparatory message for the AST swarming period – Part 2 of 2

In late 2009 and early 2010, Fiji saw an outbreak of Asian Subterranean Termites (“AST”) in Lautoka and Labasa. The Asian Subterranean Termite, scientifically known as *Coptotermes gestroi*, is an intelligent insect pest which tunnels its way through the soil to its food source. AST establish colonies 6 – 18 feet underground making it difficult to detect them until damage signs are seen. It is one of the most difficult species of termites in the world and the second most destructive. The Lautoka and Labasa districts are recognized as Biosecurity Emergency areas for AST.

In last week’s article, the following information was provided: what termite swarming is, why and when termites swarm and what do alates (swarming termites) look like. This week, we will look at what the public should do when they see termite swarms and also how to check homes for termite infestation.

What is a termite swarm?

Swarming or flying termites are often seen near garage doors, window and door frames, columns supporting porches, dirt-filled porches and expansion joints. When termites swarm indoors, they will come out of walls or wooden construction (baseboards, door frames, posts, etc.) through small holes. These are called “exit holes” and were created by worker termites.

A termite swarm will last about 30-40 minutes and the swarming termites will fly toward a light source, typically collecting around windows and sliding glass doors. If these termites cannot find soil, they will die in a few hours from dehydration. Often homeowners find many dead swarmers (or sometimes just their wings) on window sills, counter tops and around furniture. This is the aftermath of a termite swarm.



Most of the time, a termite swarm is the only time homeowners actually see termites or find out they have termites before damage is discovered. Mature termite colonies will produce winged reproductive termites that will fly off from the colony in great numbers. This is nature’s way of termites spreading and establishing new colonies. Termite swarms can occur both indoors and outside.

Some tips to handle a termite swarm:

DO NOT:

1. panic;
2. spray the swarmers with any type of insecticide;
3. try to seal exit holes as swarmers must escape and by sealing the holes with tape will only cause them to make new holes to escape from.

INSTEAD:

It is recommended that home owners living in the Biosecurity Emergency areas for AST turn off all lights in and around their homes at dusk or first light in the evening. Termite swarmers are attracted to light during their flight and if lights are kept on, then unfortunately their new home might be your house!

People living in the infested zones are requested to close all windows and doors from 5.30 pm to 8.00 pm and switch off all lights outside their homes and use minimal lightings inside. While lights are off, light small and supervised fires in controlled areas outside and away from the house which will attract the swarmers and see their demise. This is an effective way of killing flying termites which will reduce their population and is a proactive measure recommended to prevent termite infestation.

If you see detached wings in or out of your house during the swarming period, it is an indication that termites may be establishing their nest close to your house. Once termite swarms enter homes, they are likely to shed their wings and form new colonies which would be very destructive for the houses – especially if majority of the structural components are wood.

The public is requested to act responsibly during the AST swarming period and assist the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF) Termites Operations Unit to contain and control AST and prevent them from spreading.

What to do if you suspect AST infestation?

Termite swarms indicate that a current colony is flourishing nearby, it is important to inspect your home and property carefully. If you think you may have termite activity, please feel free to visit the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji Termite Operations office at Vomo Street in Lautoka or Macuata House in Labasa to register your complaints. Biosecurity Officers will then make a visit to check for AST infestation and undertake necessary work from thereon.



Picture credit: www.landmarkhw.com

For Further Information, Please Contact:

Biosecurity Authority of Fiji on 3312512 or Short Codes:

General Enquiries - 5994,

Termites - 5996, Giant Invasive Iguana (GII) - 5995,

Animal Disease Surveillance - 5997

or email info@baf.com.fj,

visit BAF website www.baf.com.fj