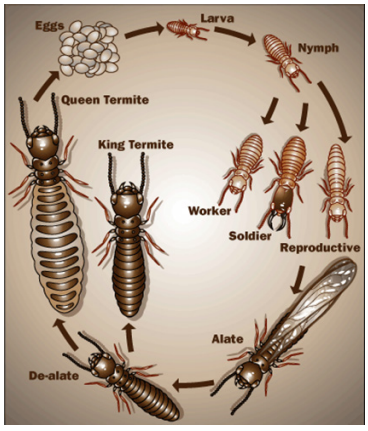
PROTECT YOUR HOMES FROM FLYING TERMITES DURING THE SWARMING PERIOD

In late 2009 and early 2010, Fiji saw an outbreak of the 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 Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF) under its mandate and national obligation has taken charge for the containment and control of AST infestation and also put in place measures to prevent the spread of AST from the Lautoka and Labasa districts to other parts of Fiji. Under a government gazetted "Emergency Declaration", the Lautoka and Labasa districts are recognized as biosecurity emergency areas for AST.

BAF would like to notify all Fijians residing in and around the Lautoka and Labasa districts that the termite swarming season (September to November) is here and there will be visibility of more termites than usual. People living in districts neighboring Lautoka and Labasa should also be mindful of this. Swarming occurs every year and the public residing in the AST infested areas are advised to remain calm and take heed of the information and directions provided through this article. It important for people to understand the different castes of termites, why and when do termites swarm as well as what flying termites look like including differences between flying ants and flying termites.

Termite swarms mark the start of termite season. A termite colony is split into groups known as castes. Each caste has a particular role in the colony. The 3 castes of a termite colony are "workers", "soldiers" and "alates". Out of all the termite castes, it is only the alates which can fly, being the only ones that are able to develop wings. These are the only termites which are sexually developed and are the future kings and queens of the next season's termite colonies. The flying patterns and habits of termites are known as swarms.



Why do termites swarm?
Termites swarm to breed and start new colonies. A termite swarm marks the beginning of the termite life cycle. During this period, the sexually developed male and female winged termites leave their nests and take flight. This is often referred to as 'nuptial flight'. After leaving their nest, the winged termites congregate in the air (swarms) and mate with termites of the same species from other colonies. After they have successfully mated, the termites land, shed their wings and start the process of creating a new colony.

When do termites swarm?
AST in Fiji have been observed to normally swarm during September to November period (swarms may start appearing in mid-August during some years). Winged termites are highly attracted to sources of light such as street lamps and can often be found swarming around these sources. Termites aren't very good fliers and generally rely on the wind to help with air mileage.

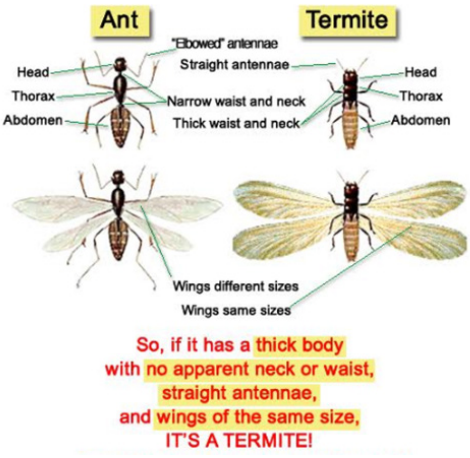
Because of this, termite swarms don't last long, and can be found close to the originating nests. However, if the wind is strong the future king and queen termites will often travel far before beginning the process of starting a new colony. Therefore, one of the ways to prevent new areas being colonized is to kill the termite swarmers and prevent them from establishing new colonies.

A termite swarm attracted to light

What does a flying termite look like?
Flying termites differ in appearance from other flying insects and can be identified by examining them closely. They have two antennae which are often straight with a slight curve and have two sets of wings which are equal in length and white and translucent in color with vein like structures. Termites, in general, can be defined by their body shape. Both flying termites and wingless termites have a thick body made up of one part. Termites do not have a constriction between their thorax and abdomen like ants do.

What is the difference between a Flying Termite and a Flying Ant?
Ants and termites often get confused with one another to the untrained eye. There have been many instances where

termites have been dismissed as white ants. In reality, there is no such thing as white ants, and they are, in fact, termites. Flying termites and flying ants are no exceptions to the matter. Both insects are similar in shape, size and color.



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 there 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 maybe 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 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.