Termites in mulch from New Orleans?

I have never experienced any email that has moved as quickly as the email concerning Formosan termites being spread in mulch from Louisiana. It has already made its way to some of the “Urban Legend” sites. This email has caused much concern but is it true?

In today’s article I’ll share with you a collection of information from University of Florida and Louisiana State University entomologists and an urban legend site concerning the movement of termites with mulch from Louisiana.

It is true that there is a lot of cellulose debris (wood, paper, etc.) in Louisiana following hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Formosan subterranean termites are found in the parishes affected by the hurricanes.

University of Florida entomologists confirm that termites cannot survive the mulching process but may reinfest mulch after it has been created, bagged and awaiting shipment.

The Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry (LDAF) imposed a quarantine for the Formosan subterranean termite on October 3, 2005, in all of the parishes affected by the hurricanes. Efforts are in place to prevent the spread of the Formosan termite in mulch or other materials.

Provisions of the quarantine imposed by the LDAF include:

- Movement of wood or cellulose material is prohibited unless either (1) it is fumigated or treated for Formosan subterranean termites and is approved for movement by the commissioner or his designee(s) or (2) written authorization is given by the commissioner or his designee(s) for the movement of untreated wood or cellulose material from the quarantined parishes.

- Additionally, it is strongly recommended and urged that all new construction and reconstruction of structures in the quarantined parishes use termite-resistant materials.

So, while it is possible that some Katrina wood debris has crossed the state line through the negligence or unscrupulousness of private individuals, Louisiana would be in violation of its own quarantine rules if it were true that, as claimed in the email, "the state is trying to get rid of tons and tons of this mulch to any state or company who will come and haul it away."

Basically, the entomologists indicate that we should not get too excited about mulch spreading Formosan termites at this point. They seem to be more concerned about other more common methods of movement, primarily through the use of older landscape timbers and railroad ties.
Keep in mind that Formosan termites are not only found in Louisiana but have been in our area at least since the early 1990’s.

If you need reliable information on Formosan termites, contact a reputable and licensed pest control operator, your local UF/IFAS Extension Office, or access the following websites.

http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG064

http://www.lsuagcenter.com

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