LD
5655
A761
I57
no.229



# VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

VIRGINIA TECH

VPI Publications

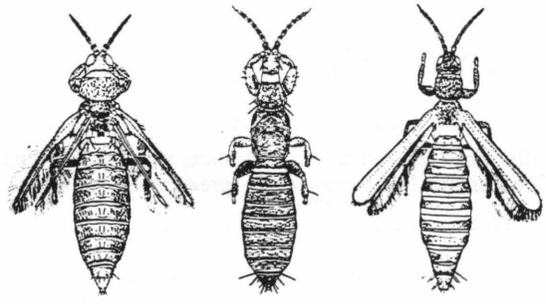
VIRGINIA STATE

No. 229
July 10, 1992

INSECT NOTES

## THRIPS

Thrips are small (1/8 to 1/16 inch) insects that usually go unnoticed--except when they bite! The biology and habits of the majority of thrips is that they live and feed on plant tissue, primarily on the flowering parts of plants. However, there are some species that attack and feed on other insects and these species can bite man. These small insects have piercing-rasping mouthparts (sounds a little gruesome doesn't it!), and use them to feed on plant sap.



Because of their small size and the fact that they can occur in large numbers, thrips can be pests in and around houses. They can fly indoors through screens and under loose fitting storm windows. Although they can not live indoors for very long, a bit too dry for them, they can create some concern for a few days. There are often reports of thrips spending time on clothes lines, and biting people that are hanging wash outdoors (we still do that, don't we?)

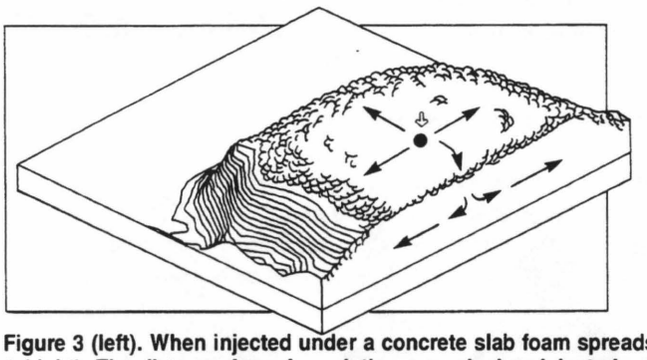
*Control*. Aerosol insecticides are probably the best means of reducing or eliminating these insects from household environments. Limited spraying of infested areas should be sufficient, as these insects are reasonably susceptible to commonly used insecticides.

## FOAM FORMULATIONS FOR TERMITE CONTROL

The traditional techniques for the control of termites in and around buildings is the application of a liquid termiticide to the soil and beneath the concrete slab. Recently, this method of control has been changed (enhanced?) to include the use of a foam formulation of termiticide that is applied to the voids that exist beneath concrete slabs and under porches (and other slabs with voids). The application has been used by one major pest control company, but other smaller companies are beginning to use this technique. As it is rather new (started in Virginia just this year), homeowners and others may have some questions about this method.

Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and employment are open to all, regardless of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, handicap, or political affiliation. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia State University, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. James F. Johnson, Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg; Lorenza W. Lyons, Interim Administrator, 1890 Extension Program, Virginia State, Petersburg.

For the last two years we (Urban Pest Control Research Center) have conducted research on the use of foam application beneath concrete slabs. The use of foam has some distinct advantages over the application of liquid, including safety for the applicator and an increase in the spread of the termiticide under the slab. Basically, we found that foam formulations spread significantly more than liquid, and this spread can provide for better coverage of the soil with termiticide. We have not evaluated all the different foam application devices and the different kinds of foam. There are some differences in these areas, but they do not seem to be significant. There may be some increase in cost n the termite control provided by companies using foam, and this cost increase is associated with the equipment and the foam-making liquid. Certainly, the use of liquid termiticide can provide effective and long-lasting control. The companies that do not use foam can provide the protection and control necessary.



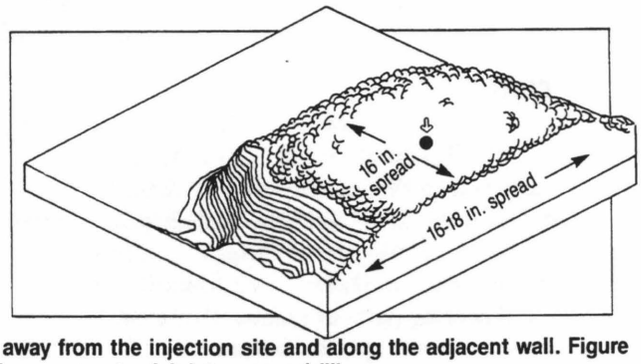
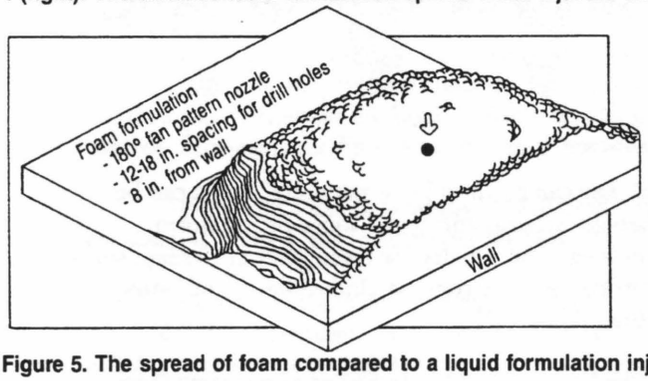



**Figure 3 (left). When injected under a concrete slab foam spreads away from the injection site and along the adjacent wall. Figure 4 (right). The distance foam formulation spread when injected under a concrete slab into a gravel fill.**



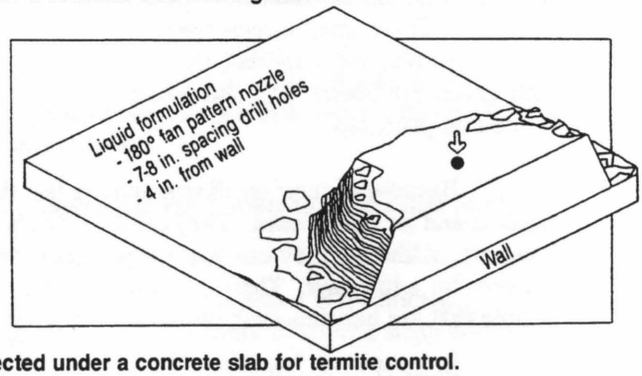
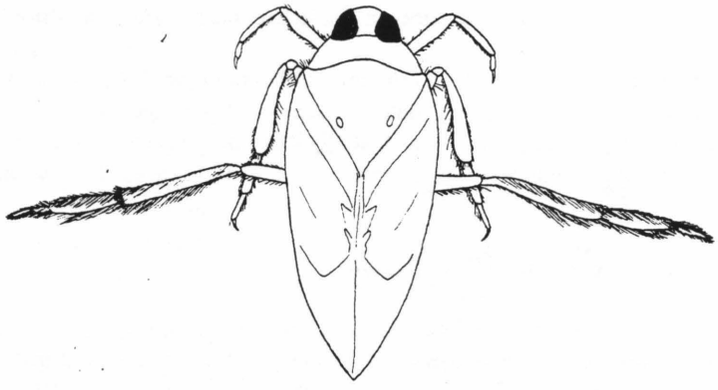




**Figure 5. The spread of foam compared to a liquid formulation injected under a concrete slab for termite control.**

## SWIMMING POOL INSECTS

There are several kinds of insects that can occur in backyard or public swimming pools. Many are simply floating--dead or alive--on the water, they will not harm bathers and can be removed easily. However, there are a few aquatic insects that can survive well in swimming pools and can deliver a nasty bite to bathers. One of the common biting insects found in swimming pools is the backswimmer--so named because of the way it moves through the water.

Backswimmers are pale green to brown insects that happen to swim upside down in the water (on their back!). They frequently just rest at the surface of the water, with the body at an angle and the head pointed down. They can swim rapidly by using their hind legs like oars. Backswimmers are predaceous on other insects that may be found in the water. However, they will bite man, and the effect is much like a bee sting. They can be removed from swimming pools with cleaning nets, but because they are good flyers--they can easily return. These insects are somewhat attracted to lights at night. Reducing the lights around swimming pools that are frequented by these insects may help in control.



## DRAIN FLIES

Drain flies or moth flies are common pests indoors during most seasons of the year. These small, "fuzzy" winged flies are usually found in the bathroom flying at the window or around the toilet. The adults spend more time resting on the wall than they do flying, so they are easily noticed! The adults do not bite, but when they are present in large numbers they can cause some concern among homeowners.

Understanding the biology and habits of drain fly larvae and adults can help make decisions regarding control strategies. The immature stages of these flies live in the accumulated organic matter associated with bathroom drains and fixtures. Often there is enough of this material in a shower stall or bathtub to provide numerous larvae with adequate food. The adult flies remain close to the food source of the larvae because that is a preferred place to deposit eggs (for the next generation).

*Control*. The easiest and perhaps best control for these flies is to clean the drain of all the accumulated organic matter. This will remove the larval feeding and egg-laying site. Use boiling water down the drain to kill the larvae that may be present. There is really no need to use insecticides in this situation.

**THE MAILBAG**

Some of the recent questions we have had regarding the control of household and turf insect pests:

**Where can I purchase milky spore, and does it work?**

Milky spore can usually be purchased from farm supply or gardening supply stores or outlets. This material--a bacterium--is sold by a few companies, and under several trade names. Now, does it work? Yes it does--has been working since 1933 when the USDA found it in a pasture in New Jersey! Milky spore is effective in contolling ONLY Japanese beetle grubs. It is not effective in killing the white grubs (immature stages) of other ground infesting beetle larvae--such as masked chafers, and green June beetles--sorry!

**What insect is eating the mortar between the bricks on the outside of my house?**

Actually, there is NO insect that eats the mortar between bricks! What often happens is that small holes develop in the mortar--simply a matter of ageing of the sand and cement--and some insects expand these small holes for nesting purposes. Usually it is small bees and wasps that fly in and out of these holes, and they get the attention of homeowners. No need to treat the outside of the house with insecticide.

**Is the Formosan termite found in Virginia?**

No, it is not! I know there have been some reports in regional newspapers about Formosan termites, and how they will eat concrete, bricks, small cars, and washing machines! But most of this is not true (the part about the bricks). It is true that this species of termite is a little more difficult to control. However, the Formosan termite is not found in Virginia.

**What can I use to treat my cat for fleas? What insecticide can I apply to my cat that will kill the fleas; is there a "dip" that works for cats?**

I do not recommend applying anything! to a cat for flea control--unless it is specifically labelled for that purpose. Many homeowners are familiar with the procedure of apply a small amount of 1% carbaryl dust to dogs for flea and tick control. Do not do this for your cat! Cats are very sensitive animals, and can react quite unfavorably to exposure to insecticides placed on their fur/skin. Use only products specificaly labelled for CATS.