Termite-infested Mulch from New Orleans ....Rumors are False

An e-mail rumor peaked last week that mulch made from trees blown over by Hurricane Katrina is infested with Formosan termites and is being sold to the public, primarily through Home Depot. Louisiana State University rebutted the rumor, releasing a statement that the affected area, although infested with Formosan termites is under quarantine, and no untreated wood products harvested from Katrina would be on the market legally. Web site Snopes.com originally had the rumor listed as “undetermined,” which increased consumer fears. Bob LaGasse, Exec. Dir. of Mulch & Soil Council, contacted Snopes.com last Friday with up-to-the-minute information on the mulch, and the Web site updated the rumor from ”undetermined” to up-to-the-minute information on the mulch, and the Web site updated the rumor from “undetermined” to “false.”

Information submitted by:
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MORE INFORMATION...
TO: Garden Writers Association Members  
FROM: Steve Dobbs, President  
RE: Debunking an Internet Hoax

The anonymous Internet message regarding potential termite infestation of mulch from the Katrina clean-up effort continues to circulate and stir both consumer and industry concern. The Mulch & Soil Council has been working with universities, retailers and web sites to provide the correct information. The Council has issued a press release to the general media to debunk the issue. I want GWA members to be advised of this problem and the response in the event you receive inquiries from your readers. The MSC press release can be found at the following URL:

http://www.mulchandsoilcouncil.org/Inforesorce/Pressrelease.html

Multiple websites have begun providing information debunking the widely circulated Internet message. Here are a few resources you may wish to note for any reader inquiries:

From the National Plant Board:
http://www.nationalplantboard.org/la_mulch.html

From Snopes.com Rumor Website:
http://www.snopes.com/inboxer/household/termites.asp

From Texas Nursery & Landscape Assn:
http://www.tnlaonline.org/#merchant

From Texas A&M Extension:
http://agnews.tamu.edu/dailynews/stories/ENTO/Mar0306a.htm

From Louisiana State University:
http://www.lsuagcenter.com/en/environment/insects/Termites/formosan_termites/Efforts+under+way+to+prevent

From Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry:
http://www.ldaf.state.la.us/aboutldaf/presscenter/pressreleases/pressrelease.asp?id=542

From Chron.com media tracker:

If you have any new information on this issue, please contact the GWA office. We will continue to monitor the situation and advise members of new developments.

Universally, there is agreement that buying mulch from reliable vendors is extremely helpful. Situations like this are exactly the reason the Mulch & Soil Council developed the Product Certification Program. Without certification backed by industry standards and product testing, consumers have little means to identify quality products from less reliable products in the market place.