

Exotic species of termite found in Keys

By Lisa Fuss

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KEY WEST — A new, more aggressive species of termite has been discovered in Key West, and experts believe the wood-eating insect has the potential to wreak severe damage throughout the Keys.

The first case of *Coptotermes havilandi* — more commonly known as Haviland's subterranean termite — was documented eight months ago at a duplex in Sigsbee Park, a U.S. Navy housing area.

Since the initial discovery, three more homes in New Town have been found to be infested with the exotic termites, which experts say probably

arrived from Cuba or the West Indies aboard infested boats.

Although there have been no reported cases of the termites elsewhere in the Keys, the subterranean insect will make its way up U.S. 1 and back into Miami, where the first U.S. case of the Haviland's termite was documented in 1996, said Dr. Rudolf Scheffrahn, a University of Florida scientist who specializes in termites and structural pests.

"Will they show up throughout the Keys next year? I'd say no, but certainly within the next 20 to 30 years," said Scheffrahn, who identified the source of the initial infestation in October. "I suspect Key West will

start seeing more cases, but the termites are weak fliers, so it's going to take a while before we see them spread north. They fly a few hundred yards every few years or so. Then again, it takes only five minutes for someone to load up some infested lumber and cart it across town. That could be trouble."

Although termites are not harmful to humans, the insects are significantly more threatening to wooden structures than that of the more common West Indian powderpost drywood termite and dampwood termite. Because a mature colony of Haviland's termites can have as many as a million insects, one colony can infest an entire neighborhood.