



Issued in: June 2008

Serial No: 02/08

LIVE-WOOD TERMITES OF HIGH GROWN TEA AND THEIR MANAGEMENT

(This Circular cancels Advisory Circular No. 16, Serial No. 2/76, issued in November 1983)

1. Method of detection of termite-infested plants

The Up country Live-wood Termite (*Postelectrotermes militaris* Desneux) gains entry into the tea plant through the roots and construct galleries within the woody tissues of the roots, collar, and finally the branches. As a result of this concealed habitat, an infested bush remains unnoticed. However, when branches are affected, prune cuts made at the time of pruning would show cavities filled with faecal matter, and occasionally the termites as well.

During periods of moisture stress, one or two branches on a bush may also show signs of wilting. Since such wilting may be caused for reasons other than termite infestation, a few of these branches should be cut back and examined to confirm whether termite infestation is the cause, or whether there are other causes.

2. Method of uprooting termite-infested areas

When termite-infested bushes are noticed at pruning, the frames of neighbouring bushes should also be examined carefully for signs of galleries. Such infested bushes should be uprooted until two concentric rings of plants show no further signs of infestation by termites. The particular patch should be blocked out, the area deep-forked and all tea roots, at least up to pencil thickness, should be removed. The uprooted plants and roots should be collected and burnt *in situ*, and should not be transported out of the infested area. A few old tar- or oil-barrels could be used to burn the infested bushes and roots in.

3. Treatment

Even though all infested plants and roots are removed and burnt *in situ*, in practice a few roots are likely to be left behind, from which re-infestation could subsequently occur. An extended period of rehabilitation (up to four years) would guarantee the decay of such root fragments, and so prevent re-infestation. It is therefore suggested that after having ensured a thorough root-removal operation following uprooting, commencing around December of the year of prune, the area be leveled and prepared for planting with Guatemala or Mana grass with the onset of the south-west monsoonal rains in May/June of the year following the prune. The grass should then be retained throughout the entire cycle (4-5 years) and the block planted to tea in the year of the following prune. During the extended period of rehabilitation under grass, any small, infested root fragments left behind would have decayed. The grass should be regularly lopped, and the loppings incorporated into the soil to improve the soil organic matter content and the soil structure.

4. Suggested Programme for termite control

Termite control on the estate-scale should not be attempted haphazardly and a well-defined programme should be developed to control the pest (Figure 1). Work should be undertaken on a priority basis, and programmed in the following manner.