



# Choosing a Pest Management Company to Protect Your Home Against Termites

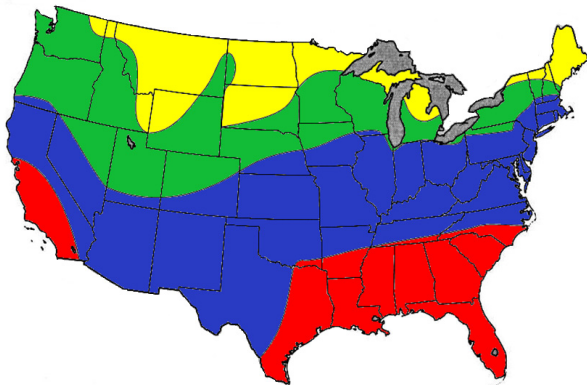
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This fact sheet discusses some questions that a homeowner can ask the pest management professional before hiring a company to prevent or control termites in their home.

Termites are severe wood-destroying pests present in all counties of Oklahoma. They cause tens-of-millions of dollars of damage annually to wooden structures across the United States. Termite pressure (risk) may range from very heavy in southeastern counties to moderate-to-heavy in the rest of the state (Figure 1). Generally, the farther north and west you go, termite pressure declines. North because of colder weather and west because of drier conditions.



- Region I Very Heavy
- Region II Moderate to Heavy
- Region III Slight to Moderate
- Region IV None to Slight

Figure 1. Relative termite pressure (risk) in the U.S.

Termites are soft-bodied, approximately one-quarter inch to one-half inch long, pale insects that can be in several different forms (castes). The different castes found in a termite colony are the founding king and queen (primary reproductive), swarmer (alates, young kings and queens), soldiers, and workers (pseudergates). These general castes are shown in Figures 2 and 3. The winged forms (alates) have two pair of wings that are almost equal in length. When termites are swarming, this caste is what homeowners are reporting. The caste that causes damage to wooden structures is the worker. Workers are not usually visible unless their mud tubes or tunnels are damaged, exposing the crawling termites.

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Fact Sheets are also available on our website at: <http://osufacts.okstate.edu>

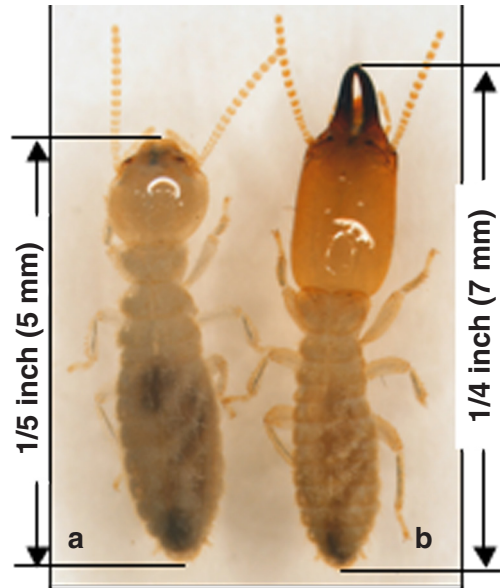


Figure 2. Oklahoma native subterranean termites, worker (a) and soldier (b).

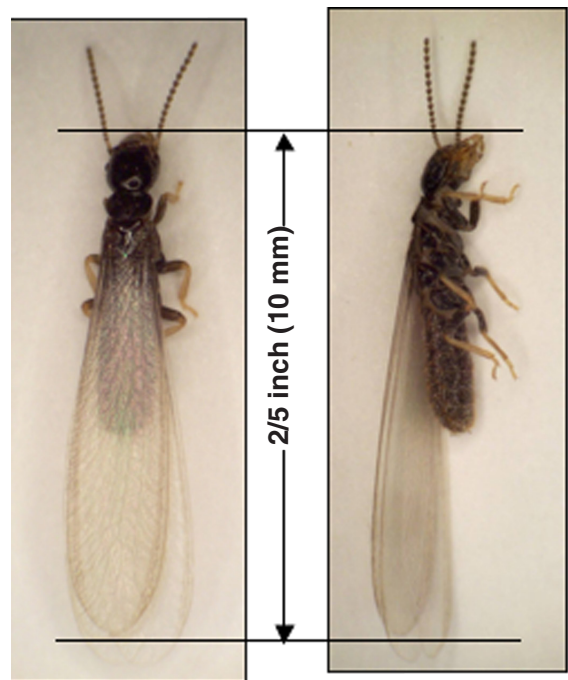


Figure 3. Oklahoma native subterranean termite swarmer (alate).

The thorax and abdomen are broadly connected, both about the same width. That is, there is no narrowing or constricted waste line between these two body regions. The bodies of termites are tubular-oval, not flattened. Figure 2 illustrates two castes, a worker and a soldier, showing the characters that are useful for identification. Figure 3 is a dorsal (top) and side view of a swarmer (alate) termite.

Generally, subterranean termites must maintain contact with soil to survive. However, there are occasions where native subterranean termites can live above ground in structures and be completely cut off from soil contact; although, this is not common. The probability that termites will attack a wooden structure within 10 years to 20 years after construction is greater than 70 percent in Oklahoma. Termite attacks may even begin within a year after construction. Proper treatment of the soil with a liquid termiticide (insecticide formulated for termite control) before construction (pre-treatment) significantly reduces the threat from subterranean termites. If you know or suspect that your home is infested with termites, retain the services of a professional termite management company. Termite management requires specialized equipment, professional knowledge and experience. This publication reviews steps that will help you select a termite management company.

## Homeowner Considerations

### What do you do when termites are discovered in your house?

**1. Do not overreact or stress out.** There is no need to become unduly alarmed if you learn that your home has a termite infestation. Termites work slowly so your house will not be quickly destroyed or collapse overnight. The termites have been there for months or years, so taking a few days to determine your termite management options is acceptable.

**2. Assess the situation.** There is no need to allow anyone to rush you into purchasing termite management services. Take the time you need to make an informed decision. A delay of a few days or weeks will make little difference. There is always some time to purchase this service knowledgeably and at your convenience.

**3. If you are not certain that termites are attacking your home, contact local pest control companies and discuss their termite inspection services and treatment options.** Arrange for a thorough termite inspection with the knowledge that prices for inspections, service estimates and payment terms can vary among companies. A proper inspection should include a short written report or inspection sheet that notes the location of areas damaged by either currently active or inactive previous termite infestations. Inactive infestation means that termites were previously active in a particular area of your house but were not there at the time of the inspection. The report should also include a description of how many and the type of treatments that will be made to eliminate the infestation. A diagram of your house should be included and is extremely helpful by indicating the location of structural features such as utility pipe accesses, porches, walkways and patios, and areas of wood-to-soil contact as well as areas with drainage or moisture problems in or near your home. An estimated total cost of termiticide applications

or bait system installation, labor and materials used should also be included. Determine whether the cost estimate is a set final price and be cautious if it is not. Feel free to seek a second opinion, quote or inspection, and inform each company involved that their competitors were contacted and what you have learned. Treat company technicians with the same respect and courtesy you expect in return.

**4. Evaluate various treatment methods.** Liquid termiticide treatments to the soil are used to establish an insecticide barrier between the structure and the termite colonies in the soil.

Existing concrete slab foundation houses normally require at least three types of treatment: 1) treatment under concrete floor slab, including porches or patios abutting the house; 2) trenching and treating soil around the concrete slab perimeter outside of and adjacent to the house; and 3) drilling and treating the void behind the rock or brick veneer.

*a. Repellent and contact toxic insecticides.* The soil beneath the floor slab perimeter inside the footer or stem wall must be treated. Treatment also may be required along both sides of interior support walls, next to interior partitions, and along all cracks and expansion joints in the slab if termites are found in these locations. Sometimes, it is necessary to treat the interior slab perimeter by drilling horizontally or at an angle through the exterior foundation walls. This method is often used to treat kitchens and bathrooms from outside the structure. Holes drilled in the slab should be spaced no further than 12 inches apart to achieve an effective, continuous barrier. The actual sub-slab treatment is accomplished by injecting the termiticide through the concrete slab with a special hollow cylindrical rod inserted vertically through the previously drilled holes.

Trenching of soil requires excavating a 6 inch to 8 inch wide by 6 inch to 8 inch deep trench adjacent to the outside foundation wall. Homes on pier and beam foundations are additionally trenched by excavating soil in an area 6 inches to 8 inches wide by 4 inches to 6 inches deep around all piers and utility pipes beneath the home, and along inside and outside foundation walls. Trenching is labor intensive and time consuming but provides a better, more continuous barrier than rodding alone. Make sure that all soil back-filled into the trench is treated. When trenching is not possible, treatment to soil is sometimes done by injection with the hollow rod alone. Additional sub-slab injection may be required on porches, patios, breezeways, driveways and entryways where separate concrete slabs exist.

*b. Exterior (stand alone) perimeter liquid termiticide treatments with insecticides that are not repellent to or detectable by termites have become widespread and popular with homeowners as well as pest management professionals.* As of 2010, three termiticides have been registered for use as exterior perimeter treatments that are accompanied by limited interior treatments when needed. When applied correctly, these termiticides are reported to provide effective termite management. An exterior perimeter treatment is less invasive than traditional liquid treatments to the soil that also require inside sub-slab applications. If the structure is inspected and no termite infestation is found, this group of liquid termiticides can be applied to the soil around the exterior perimeter of the structure only. If the structure is inspected and found to have an interior termite infestation, the soil beneath the concrete

slab inside the structure must be treated in the area of the infestation. Label requirements as well as Oklahoma minimum standards must be met.

*c. Bait Systems - as of 2010, there are several manufacturers producing baiting systems for management of subterranean termites.* BASF/Whitmire manufactures the Advance® Termite Bait System. DowAgro Sciences manufactures the Sentricon® System. FMC Corp. manufactures the Firstline® System. Ensystem manufactures the Exterra System. The Advance, Sentricon and Exterra® systems utilize insect growth regulators (IGR's) as their active ingredients, while Firstline incorporates a stomach poison. One disadvantage of baiting systems is that they tend to have unpredictable time frames for effectively clearing out termites. Control may require two, three or up to six months and sometimes longer. Advantages of baiting systems include little risk of human exposure to pesticides and improved control in building areas that are difficult to treat with conventional liquid termiticide applications to soil (e.g., features such as sunken living rooms, damaged foundations, unusual high-value/expensive floor coverings, and areas that have a history of unsuccessful treatments to soil). OSU does not recommend 'do-it-yourself' or 'over-the-counter' baiting systems. If you choose to use a baiting system around your home, hiring a pest control company experienced with baiting systems is recommended.

*d. Foam is used to apply termiticide to various construction features of a home.* This formulation should be used to treat difficult to reach areas such as chimney bases, dirt-filled porches and inaccessible sub-slab areas. However, foam is not suitable or effective for treating the soil directly, and with most termiticide labels only a certain percentage of the total termiticide volume may be applied as foam.

*e. Electronic, ultrasonic devices.* No electronic (ultrasonic or similar devices nor electrical current delivering devices) have proven to provide effective control of subterranean termites.

**5. Purchase services from a reliable company.** Termite management services should be purchased with the same care and discrimination you would use for any other service for your home and property. Be sure that you are dealing with a reputable company that is both licensed and certified to do the work and has an established place of business.

Oklahoma has published pesticide use and applicator laws that all commercial pest management companies must follow. Each company and each individual will have an identification card issued by the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture Food and Forestry (ODAFF) indicating their pesticide applicator certification categories.

**6. Check on Association membership.** Membership in the Oklahoma Pest Control Association is evidence that a company has an established place of business, ascribes to a code of ethics, and has access to technical literature for training and consultation. The membership list of this association may be obtained by writing directly to: President, Oklahoma Pest Control Association, 2600 SW 44th St, Oklahoma City, OK 73119, 405-685-2036 or check their web address: [www.ok-pca.com](http://www.ok-pca.com).

#### **7. Things to remember:**

- If a company offers references of previous work, take time to contact these references.

- If the company is located in your town or city, make sure it has an established place of business. This can be checked through the Chamber of Commerce, Better Business Bureau, the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture Food and Forestry, or a street address in the phone book.

- If a company address or phone number is from out-of-town, it is even more important that you make sure it is dependable. Check that it has an established place of business in the town where it claims to be located.

- Ask for references and take the time to check them.

#### **8. Beware of companies that:**

- Quote a price based on the gallons of material used.
- Profess to have a secret formula or ingredient for termite control. All termiticides must be registered by the Environmental Protection Agency, there are no secret formulas.

- Have no listed telephone number.

- Show up unexpectedly and use evidence of termites in trees or other nearby houses as an excuse to inspect your house or provide you a service.

- Use high-pressure sales tactics.

- Want to trim trees and do general foundation repair work as part of the "deal."

- Cater to elderly or infirm people who live alone. Relatives and neighbors should warn elderly people to beware of persons who knock at the door and propose to do service work, including treating their house for termites.

- Claim to be endorsed by Oklahoma State University or any other state agency.

- Claim to have excess chemical left over from another job and offer a reduced price if they can do the treatment immediately.

- Use alarming terms, stating you must receive a treatment immediately to avoid great damage.

#### **9. Become knowledgeable of the structural pest control requirements governing inspections and treatments.**

Inspections conducted to establish the need for treatment may be made using a company's own form, or on Oklahoma's ODAFF 1 form. **An inspection made for a property sales transaction must be made on the ODAFF 1 form.**

Before conducting a termiticide application or installing a baiting system, the pest control company proposing the treatment must present you with a disclosure statement that contains the following information:

- Graph and description of the structure or structures to be treated, showing areas with currently active or previous termite damage.

- The name of the pesticide(s) to be used along with the label for the termiticide.

- Complete details of the warranty provided, including:

- areas excluded from treatment, if any;

- warranty time period;

- renewal option(s) and cost(s);

- obligations to re-treat or repair damage caused by termites within the warranty period;

- conditions that could develop as a result of the owner's action or inaction that could void the warranty; and

- signature of approval by a certified applicator.

**10. Know the terms of your contract.** Ask your termite control specialist to provide a written statement of the work they propose to do and an estimate of its cost. They will give you time to consider their estimate. It is customary to provide a warranty on termite control work, either on a year-to-year basis or for a longer period. Plan on extending the warranty for at least the first 2 years or 3 years after the treatment is made. Make sure you know the terms of the warranty offered. Compare warranties carefully. A warranty is a guarantee of service, not a guarantee of an effective termite barrier. Warranties that vaguely refer to termite control are not acceptable. Determine whether a yearly charge will be levied during the warranty period, or whether these charges are included in the initial price. Find out how much it will cost to extend the warranty for additional years, and ask how long it can be extended. Remember that a warranty is no better than the person or company who gives it to you. A warranty is not evidence that a firm is dependable. Make sure you get copies of the contract and any warranties for your records. You will probably be asked to sign a work order or contract when you hire a company and pay for services up-front. Clearly understand what obligations you are assuming and what you will receive in return. As required by law, the

contract must include its terms and conditions in writing. It includes but is not limited to warranties or guarantees for structural pest control applications. The contract shall also include a statement, plat or diagram showing all locations of visible termites and termite-damaged materials that are observed and how the application was performed.

### **Informational Websites**

Oklahoma State University  
Pesticide Safety Education Program  
[www.pested.okstate.edu](http://www.pested.okstate.edu)

Oklahoma Department of Agriculture  
Food & Forestry  
<http://www.state.ok.us/~okag/>

Oklahoma Pest Control Association  
<http://www.ok-pca.com/>

National Pest Management Association  
<http://www.npmapestworld.org/default.asp>

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