



Choosing a Termite Control Service

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



worker



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Termites are wood destroying insects common in most areas of Oklahoma. They cause millions of dollars of damage annually. Subterranean termites live in the soil and are found throughout the state. The probability that termites will attack wooden structures within 10 to 20 years of being built is greater than 70 percent in Oklahoma. Termite attacks may even begin within a year after construction. Proper treatment of the soil with termiticidal chemicals before construction (pre-treatment) will reduce the threat of subterranean termites.

If you know or suspect that your home is infested with termites retain the services of a competent, professional termite control company. Termite control requires specialized equipment and professional knowledge. This publication reviews steps which will help you select a termite control service.

- 1. Do not panic.** There is no need to become unduly alarmed if you learn that termites are or may be attacking your home. Termites work slowly so your house will not be ruined or collapse overnight.
- 2. Take your time.** Do not permit anyone to rush you into purchasing termite control services. Take the time you need to make an informed decision. A delay of a few weeks will not make any difference. There is always time to purchase this service wisely and at your convenience.
- 3. If you are not certain that termites are attacking your home, locate reliable pest control firms and discuss their termite control services.** Arrange for a thorough termite inspection, with the knowledge that prices for inspections, estimates, and terms can vary between companies. A proper inspection should include a written report which notes the location of areas damaged by either active or inactive termite infestations. Inactive infestations mean termites were infesting that particular area but are not there now — at the time of inspection. The report should also include a description of where and how many treatments will be made to control the infestation. A diagram of the structure should be included and is extremely helpful in indicating the location of structural

features such as utility accesses, porches, and areas of wood-to-soil contact, as well as areas with drainage or moisture problems in or near the structure. An estimated total cost of chemical control, labor, etc. should also be included. Determine whether the estimate is a firm price and be cautious if it is not. Feel free to seek a second opinion, quote, or inspection but let each firm involved know that other firms were contacted and what you have learned. Treat the companies with the same courtesy and respect you hope they will return as pest control professionals.

- 4. Understand various treatment methods.** Soil treatments are used to establish a chemical barrier between the wood in the structure and the termite colonies in the soil. Existing slab houses normally require at least three types of treatment: treatment under concrete floor slab (including porches or patios abutting the house), trenching and treating soil outside the house, and drilling and treating the void behind the rock or brick veneer.
 - The floor slab perimeter must be treated. Treatment may also be required along both sides of interior support walls, beside interior partitions, and along all cracks and expansion joints. At times, it is necessary to treat the slab perimeter 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 no farther apart than 18 inches and preferably only 12 inches apart in order to get a good, consistent barrier. The actual slab treatment is accomplished by injecting the termiticide through the slab with a special tool or tube inserted in the drill holes.
 - Soil trenching involves excavating a six to eight inch wide strip of soil adjacent to the outside foundation wall

on slab homes. Homes on pier and beam foundations are trenched by excavating soil in an area six to eight inches wide around all piers and pipes, and along inside and outside foundation walls. Trenching is more time consuming but provides a better, more consistent barrier than rodding alone. Make sure that all soil returned to the trench is treated. Soil treatment is sometimes done by injection.

- Additional sub slab injection may be required on porches, patios, breezeways, driveways, and entryways where separate slabs exist.

The following supplemental or alternative treatments may also be used:

- Foam is used to apply termiticide to various construction features of a home and is a relatively new technology. This formulation should be used to treat difficult areas such as chimney bases, dirt-filled porches, and certain sub slab areas. However, it is not suitable or effective for treating the soil directly.
- An alternative to liquid termiticides is the use of sand barriers. Sand with certain size particles is used to physically block termite entry into structures. This technology is new, requires considerable applicator knowledge, and is not suitable for use outdoors around the base of a foundation.
- Bait Systems — as of late 1999 there are two major manufacturers of baiting systems for control of subterranean termites: Dow Agro Sciences manufactures the Sentricon® System and FMC Corp. the Firstline® System. Ensystem has also released a third baiting system that is marketed as Exterra®. The Sentricon® and Exterra® systems utilize insect growth regulators (IGR's) as their active ingredients while Firstline® incorporates a chemical insecticide toxicant. One disadvantage of baiting systems is that they tend to have unpredictable time frames for control. Controls may require three months and sometimes much longer. Advantages of baiting systems include: no human exposure to pesticides and increased control in areas that are difficult to treat with conventional soil treatments (e.g. features such as sunken living rooms, damaged foundations, unusual floor coverings, and areas that have a history of unsuccessful soil treatments). OSU does not recommend the 'do-it-yourself' or homeowner applied baiting systems. If you are going to use baits, hire a Pest Control firm. No electronic (ultrasonic or similar such devices nor electrical current delivering devices) have proven to provide control of subterranean termites.

- 5. Purchase services from a reliable firm.** Buy termite control service with the same care and discrimination you would use in purchasing any other service for your property. Always be sure that you are dealing with a reliable firm that is both licensed and certified to do the work and has an established place of business. Here are some of the ways that you can investigate before you invest.
- Oklahoma has a pesticide use and applicator law under which all commercial pest control firms must operate. Each firm and each individual will have identification issued by the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture indicating their certification.

- Check on Association membership(s). Membership in the Oklahoma Pest Control Association is evidence that a firm 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 the President, Oklahoma Pest Control Association, 2600 SW 44th St, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73119, (405) 685-2036 or to the National Pest Control Association, 8100 Oak St., Dunn Loring, Virginia 22027, (703) 573-8330.
- If a firm offers references of previous work, take time to check them carefully.
- If the firm 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 or Better Business Bureau.
- If the firm is from out-of-town, it is even more important that you make sure it is reliable. Check that it has an established place of business in the town where it claims to be located. Most fraudulent operators work in communities where they are not known. Ask for references and check them carefully. Reliable firms welcome this approach.

6. Beware of firms 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.)
- Have no listed telephone number.
- Show up unexpectedly and use evidence of termites in trees or other nearby houses as an excuse to inspect the house.
- 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 the 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.

7. Be aware of the Structural Pest Control requirements governing inspections and treatments. Inspections conducted to establish the need for treatment may be made using the company's form, or on the "NPCA Wood Destroying Insect Infestation Report" form.

Before conducting a termite treatment, the pest control company proposing the treatment must present you with a disclosure statement which contains the following:

- Graph and description of the structure or structures to be treated.
- The name of the pesticide(s) to be used along with the label for the termiticides.
- 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.

8. Know the terms of the 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 more extended period. Plan on extending the warranty for at least the first 2 or 3 years after the treatment is made. Make sure you know exactly what warranty the firm offers. Compare warranties carefully. A warranty is a guarantee of service, not a guarantee of the termite barrier. Guarantees that vaguely refer to termite control are unacceptable. 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 firm who gives it to you. A warranty is not evidence that a firm is reliable. Most fraudulent operators use a showy contract and warranty as part of their sales promotion. Make sure you get copies of the contract and warranty for your records.

You will probably be asked to sign a work order or contract when you engage a firm. Understand clearly what obligations you are assuming and what you will get

in return. As required by law, the contract must include the terms and conditions of such agreements in writing and 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.

9. Most firms are reliable, legitimate businesses respected in their communities. Most fraudulent operators are "confidence men" whose only purpose is to swindle people out of their money. The information in this publication should help you avoid these individuals.

INFORMATIONAL WEBSITES

National Pest Control Association: www.pestworld.org

OSU Department of Entomology & Plant Pathology: www.ento.okstate.edu

Environmental Protection Agency home page: www.epa.gov

Oklahoma Department of Agriculture Pesticide Laws Page: www.state.ok.us/~okag/pco.html

RELATED FACT SHEETS

EPP-7312 - Household Pest Control

E-918 -Major Horticultural Household Insects of Oklahoma, \$6

The Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service Bringing the University to You!

The Cooperative Extension Service is the largest, most successful informal educational organization in the world. It is a nationwide system funded and guided by a partnership of federal, state, and local governments that delivers information to help people help themselves through the land-grant university system.

Extension carries out programs in the broad categories of agriculture, natural resources and environment; family and consumer sciences; 4-H and other youth; and community resource development. Extension staff members live and work among the people they serve to help stimulate and educate Americans to plan ahead and cope with their problems.

Some characteristics of the Cooperative Extension system are:

- The federal, state, and local governments cooperatively share in its financial support and program direction.
- It is administered by the land-grant university as designated by the state legislature through an Extension director.
- Extension programs are nonpolitical, objective, and research-based information.
- It provides practical, problem-oriented education for people of all ages. It is designated to take the knowledge of the university to those persons who do not or cannot participate in the formal classroom instruction of the university.
- It utilizes research from university, government, and other sources to help people make their own decisions.
- More than a million volunteers help multiply the impact of the Extension professional staff.
- It dispenses no funds to the public.
- It is not a regulatory agency, but it does inform people of regulations and of their options in meeting them.
- Local programs are developed and carried out in full recognition of national problems and goals.
- The Extension staff educates people through personal contacts, meetings, demonstrations, and the mass media.
- Extension has the built-in flexibility to adjust its programs and subject matter to meet new needs. Activities shift from year to year as citizen groups and Extension workers close to the problems advise changes.

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