

Termites

We visit so many homes where termites are an issue and thought it might be helpful if we could give our clients a simple, no-nonsense overview of a variety of common questions and answers regarding this wood-destroying insect. These are very destructive insects and here's what you should look for in your home:



These pictures show Eastern Subterranean termites at work, a close-up of a soldier and worker, swarmers, mud tubes on a basement floor joist, and damage to a hardwood floor and sub-floor. Hot zones for termites can be at the mud-sill level, sometimes behind front steps or adjacent to a slab that abuts the foundation.

Q. What do termites eat?

A. Termites will eat anything that has a wood pulp or cellulose base. This can include everything from structural timber to books, magazines, record album covers, and even the paper on sheetrock under paint or wallpaper! Termites return to the colony/nest frequently and share food by regurgitating it.

Q. Where do termites live? Do they live in my house?

A. The northeast region only has the eastern subterranean species, so those termites that might be in your home actually live 15-25 feet underground, and perhaps as far as 50 yards or more from your house.

Q. Are Termites white or black, and do they have wings?

A. The answer is YES to all three questions. Worker termites that are actually inside your house are usually a creamy white color. On the other hand, termites swarm 1-2 times per year, and when they swarm, their bodies are black, and these reproductives have wings that are probably 2½ times their body length. Nature has designed these wings so that they break off after a few short "flights" and keep them close to the source of food (possibly... your house).

Q. How much damage can termites do?

A. Each home presents a different set of problems, but we recently inspected a 9-year old garage where termites had consumed roughly 30+ pounds of lumber in destroying the garage door casings and header completely. The garage has vinyl siding and the doorframe was flashed in aluminum. Cosmetically it looked fine from a distance, but removal of the flashing revealed the voided wood underneath. The only clue was excessive sand/dust falling from the header.

Q. What are the consequences of putting off a termite treatment when we know they are active inside?

A. A good analogy would be to compare the problem to a dental situation. If you have a cavity you get a filling and that should solve the problem. If you wait a year, chances are you will need a crown and the cost could escalate to 10 times the amount. Likewise, with termites you could wind up having to have major construction work on your home if you let termite activity go unchecked in your home.

Q. When do termites come into our homes?

A. Think of termites as miniature dump trucks, traveling on a marked highway from their colony/nest to your house. During termite season, empty trucks are bumper to bumper coming in and full trucks are bumper to bumper going back to the colony 24/7. What they lack in size they make up in numbers. A typical termite colony can number 300,000 to 3,000,000 workers. Think in terms of a 55-gallon drum full of squirming grains of rice... that's a small colony.

Q. What is the benefit of a non-repellant liquid termite treatment over a baiting system?

A. Today's liquid termite soil treatments are relatively fast-acting and very effective methods to destroy or eliminate the termite colony attacking your home. Conversely, baiting systems rely on the chance that termites will "hit" the stations... which are usually 10-15 feet apart, and then once hit, a growth inhibitor is added to the bait. The process can work, but usually it requires a commitment of 24 months after discovering the "hits" before

any impact on the colony can be achieved, but even that cannot be guaranteed. With liquid treatments, the termites in the colony attacking your house are usually eliminated within 15 to 45 days. Baiting programs generally are much more expensive because of the monitoring and maintenance expenses associated with the program.

Q. How does a liquid non-repellant termiticide work to eliminate a colony?

A. Termites pass through the treated as they go back and forth from the food source to the colony every day and get some chemical residue on their bodies. They preen themselves regularly, and in the process, become unknowing carriers of the chemical as they deliver food to the colony. The Queen, king, larvae, pupae, and other underdeveloped termites eat the termiticide-enriched food and since the chemical acts like a time-release virus, they slowly begin to die off, and the process eliminates the entire colony.

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