

Rotating Article**For:** Week of March 22, 2004**By:** Mike Donahoe
County Extension Director
Santa Rosa County Extension Service**Homeowner Beware - Termites are Swarming Again**

One of the biggest threats to homes in Florida is damage by subterranean termites. Each year millions of dollars are spent on termite prevention, control and damage repair.

Subterranean termites nest in the soil as colonies ranging from a few thousand up to 10 million individuals. The colonies are composed of workers, soldiers, and reproductives. The workers are the most numerous and are the ones that actually damage wood. They are about 1/8 inch long, have no wings, and are white to cream colored.

Winged reproductives emerge from colonies in huge numbers typically twice a year: a large swarm during the spring and a smaller swarm during fall. Winged termites emerging from the ground near a house does not necessarily mean the house is infested, but it is a good reason to check further. Large numbers of winged termites inside a house are an indication of probable infestation.

The first line of defense against termite infestation occurs when a home is built. During construction, a professional pest control operator most commonly applies a chemical barrier to block termite access. This barrier is known as a "termite pre-treatment." A thorough preconstruction treatment should be expected to protect the structure for at least five years; but under less than ideal conditions or because of improper application it can be much less. In Florida, when a termite pre-treatment is performed, the pest control company must issue a warranty which can be renewed annually up to five years.

When infestations occur after a structure has been built, liquid termiticides are applied by one of three methods: rodding, drilling, or trenching. In the first method, termiticide is injected directly into the soil at specific intervals around the perimeter of the house and beneath the slab with a rodder, an injection tool with a long, hollow, metal rod. Drilling involves making holes through concrete slabs, walls, and floors in order to treat the soil beneath the slab or inside wall voids. Trenching involves digging a shallow trench around the base of the home, applying termiticide to the trench and the backfill and then refilling the trench.

Baiting systems provide an alternative to liquid termiticides. Some bait products are inserted below ground out in the yard, whereas others are installed above ground level on the inside of the structure. Termite baits use small amounts of insecticide to knock out populations of termites foraging in and around the structure. Some baits may even eradicate entire termite colonies. Regardless of which bait is used, it may take several months to a year to eliminate termites from a structure.

Other treatment methods and practices include the treatment of structural wood with borate-containing compounds or the installation of physical barriers to termite infestation. Termites will generally avoid wood that has been treated with borate compounds. Wood can be industrially pre-treated before it arrives at the construction site or field-treated during or after the structure is built.

Homeowners should consult a reputable certified pest control professional rather than attempt home remedies to control termites. Shop around for the best service at a reasonable price. Get opinions from two or more pest control firms before deciding on treatments. Have the salesperson certify in writing that the premise or structure is infested and that a treatment is required. Read proposed contracts carefully to

know exactly what the company will do and guarantee.

Contracts and warranties for post-construction treatment vary from company to company. However, the use of some terms in a contract have been specified in law (Chap. 482.227, F.S.).

- A “full” or “unlimited” guarantee or warranty means the pest control company promises to restore property damaged by wood destroying organisms covered by the contract.
- A “limited” guarantee or warranty means the pest control company promises only to provide additional treatment if an infestation occurs during a contract period.

The duration of post-construction contracts and warranties can vary from one year to five years, depending on the policy of the pest control company.

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Bureau of Entomology regulates the pest control industry in the state. If you have a pest control complaint regarding any negligence, fraudulent claims, or improper use of materials and methods, contact the Bureau’s regional inspector in Cottondale at (850) 482-9508 or Bureau Headquarters in Tallahassee at (850) 921-4177.

For more information about termites and their control contact your local Cooperative Extension Service office. Information is also available at the University of Florida Extension’s publication website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/> and at the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Service website www.floridatermitehelp.org.

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