



Protecting Your House from Termites

Environmental Health Guide

This brochure provides information on the prevention of damage to your house and property. An information sheet listing the pesticides currently approved for the treatment of termites is also available

Termites occur naturally throughout Australia and there are many species. Only a few species pose a major threat to buildings because they eat wood and other materials containing cellulose plant fibre. If left unchecked, they can damage both the strength and appearance of timbers in buildings. As the termite nest is usually beneath the soil surface, entry into a building can go unnoticed as severe structural damage may take a long time to become visible. If termites are discovered on your property there is no need to panic, but there is a need for an inspection by a licensed pest management technician.

The Rules

The Building Code of Australia requires that all new buildings have some form of protection from termites or are constructed in such a manner that would make them termite resistant. The choice of method rests with the householder. However, for new homes or additions, it is best to contact your local government as they may stipulate use of a specific method of treatment for buildings in your area.

Methods of Prevention

Four methods of preventing termite entry are currently approved:

1. Construction methods which make entry of termites visible.
2. Physical barriers e.g. stainless steel mesh, crushed granite and chemically impregnated membrane
3. Chemical barriers e.g. hand-sprayed on the sand pad or distributed through a series of pipes laid under the concrete slab.
4. Uses of termite resistant materials.

Barrier Treatment of New Buildings

An approved termiticide is applied to the sand pad and covered with a waterproof membrane. When the construction is completed, an external barrier must be established in the soil immediately surrounding the perimeter of the building. This secondary treatment is essential to protect footings of the building from subterranean termites. This barrier will need to be renewed at some future stage. The period of protection varies depending on the site conditions and termiticide used.

Treatments of Existing Buildings

Termiticides may be injected into soil around footings and/or the base of stumps or piers, or applied via a course spray into a trench around the perimeter of building and then backfilled. If applied to the sub-floor area of a building with timber floorboards, it is possible that an odour may be present in the house after the application. It is important that ventilation of the sub-floor area be properly assessed by a qualified person such as a registered builder or architect prior to this method of treatment. Choice of termiticide is important where wooden floors are concerned. As with new homes, re-treatment periods and length of protection vary depending on the termiticide used and the surrounding environment. The installation of bait stations is also an approved method of termite control, it is suggested you discuss this option with your pest management firm.



Treatment of Active Infestations

Active infestations could be treated by a licensed pesticide operator with a termiticide powder. The powder is applied to active termites so that it may be carried back to the nest and eradicate the colony. The operator will need to re-inspect 10-14 days later to monitor activity.

Simply applying a termiticide powder only, may not result in the elimination of the colony, as there are many factors which influence the success of this procedure. If termites are still active after the initial treatment, further dusting may need to be carried out or another strategy employed to resolve the problem. Nests in trees or tree stumps may also be treated with either a powder formulation or a strategically placed bait station.

Under exceptional circumstances, a treatment inside a cavity wall of the building may be required. In this event, an application may be made by your pest management firm, to the Department of Health, for an approval.

After Treatment Odour

Odours may be noticeable following treatment. They may be due to the pesticide itself, other components of the solution such as solvents or emulsifiers, or a combination of all. For houses on stumps/piers with timber floors, moisture in the sub-floor can result in strong, persistent odours. Properly ventilated sub floors will reduce and eliminate odours inside the house. If a strong smell persists inside your house after at least four hours of having opened windows and doors, you should firstly contact your pest management firm as this may be evidence of a misapplication. In this event, you should contact your local government Environmental Health Officer or the Pesticide Safety Branch on (08) 9383 4244.

Pesticide Technician

Commercial treatment of homes must only be conducted by licensed pesticide technician employed by registered pesticide firms. It is recommended that you ask the technician to produce a current licence and ensure that the work is being undertaken on behalf of a registered firm, before allowing the technician to start work. Door to door sales representatives offering pesticide treatments and providing advice on their use must also be licensed. If in doubt about the validity of a licence, phone the Pesticide Safety Branch on (08) 9383 4244.

Maintenance Inspections

The Australian Standard for termite control, AS 3660.2-2000 recommends that inspections be carried out at least annually. The inspection of properties for timber pests using AS 4349.3-1998 is highly recommended as this standard incorporates the inspection for other timber pests. An inspection should include the ceiling cavity, internal structural and decorative timbers, outside grounds, mature trees and all other accessible areas. Inspection times vary depending on the size of the property, type of building, accessibility to certain areas and the level of termite activity. If no infestation is present, treatment may not be required.

If termites are found and a pesticide treatment is required, it may only be necessary to conduct a spot treatment of the activity and the immediate vicinity. The level of treatment should be discussed with your pest management firm. Termite infestations may be as a result of an incomplete barrier, soil disturbances, building extensions, high risk construction and design, poor initial application, or normal chemical breakdown of the pesticide.



Precautions to Follow

1. Delay treatment, if possible, where there is a pregnant woman or nursing mother in the house. Urgent treatments can be confined to small spot treatments which minimise the risk of exposure.
2. Remove pets, including birds and fish, and ornamental plants from areas to be treated as these may be affected by pesticide exposure.
3. Ventilate the premises thoroughly after treatment for at least four hours. This is essential to allow pesticide odours to dissipate.
4. If you are concerned about your health, contact your Medical Practitioner.
5. Contact your local government Environmental Health Officer or the Department of Health, (08) 9388 4999 if you believe that a misapplication has occurred

Other information pamphlets available:

Facts on rats

Mosquitoes in your backyard

Approved pesticides for Termite Treatment.

This pamphlet is intended to be a brief guide only. For further information contact the
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