



Extension FactSheet

Entomology, 1991 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210

Termites: Selecting a Reliable Pest Management Company

Susan C. Jones, Ph.D.,
Assistant Professor of Entomology
Extension Specialist, Household & Structural Pests

Your home usually is your largest monetary investment. Protecting it from wood-destroying organisms such as termites is often a prime concern. Effective termite control requires experience, knowledge of termite habits, proper equipment, and effective pest management technology including insecticides. Therefore, rather than attempting “do-it-yourself” termite control, it is advisable to employ a professional pest management company (note that what we used to call “exterminators” and “pest control” companies have now adopted the term “pest management”). Selecting a pest management service is just as important as selecting any other professional such as a lawyer or doctor. Do not select a company based solely on their advertisements. Advertisements are no guarantee of reliable or effective service.

General Considerations

Most pest management firms are reliable and legitimate businesses that are respected in their communities. Ohio law requires that all pest management companies in the state be licensed through the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA), 8995 East Main Street, Reynoldsburg, OH 43068 (614-728-6987; pesticides@mail.agri.state.oh.us). ODA’s Pesticide Regulation Section registers pesticides available for sale in Ohio, and certifies, licenses, and tests commercial pesticide applicators. To obtain a business license, a company must have proof of liability insurance and must employ at least one person that is licensed (as a Commercial Applicator) to apply pesticides in specific habitats and against certain categories of pests. In order to be licensed for termite control in Ohio, an individual must be knowledgeable of pesticides, general household pests, and termites; they must pass appropriate examinations; and they must periodically attend approved re-certification training sessions.

Consumers should obtain at least three estimates from different companies before signing a contract for services. Each company

should have an established place of business. Also, evidence that a company offers its employees Worker’s Compensation Insurance is favorable. It is a good idea to ask each company to provide several references—these should pertain to homes where they have done similar work. Then contact these references.

The best companies routinely participate in training seminars, workshops, short courses, or pest management conferences to keep informed of new developments in pest management methods, safety, research, and regulation. Professional membership in a city pest management association, the Ohio Pest Control Association (937-222-1024; <http://www.ohiopca.com>), or the National Pest Management Association (703-573-8330; <http://www.pestworld.org/>) provides 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.

Take your time to select a reputable pest management company and to decide on a course of treatment. There is no need to panic or to rush into a termite control program even if you know that your house is infested with termites. Delaying a few weeks or even months makes little difference since termites work slowly and any further damage to your house will be minimal.

Do a quick background check

ODA’s Pesticide Regulation Section is an excellent source for information on Ohio pest management companies, because ODA maintains records of each company’s complaint history. ODA’s Pesticide Regulation Section can be reached at 614-728-6987 or toll-free at 1-800-282-1955. It is a good idea to check with ODA, even if you think that you are familiar with a company or its reputation. In addition, you may want to contact your local Chamber of Commerce or Better Business Bureau to determine if the company has a good track record. It is especially important to verify the reliability of an out-of-town firm.

General Process

Each company should thoroughly inspect your home prior to submitting a proposal for treatment and providing their cost estimate. Be cautious of price quotes that are substantially lower or higher than the others. However, prices for inspection, treatment, and service agreements often vary considerably.

Inspection

A thorough inspection will require time to determine types of construction and to inspect crawl spaces, basements, attics, and other areas. This involves inspecting indoors and outdoors in the vicinity of the structure. After an inspection, the technician should discuss any termite problems and submit a proposal for treatment. It is a good idea to ask to see these problem areas and have the technician point out characteristics that will enable you to identify termites or their damage. If you have any doubts about the identity of an insect specimen, submit it to OSU's Plant and Pest Diagnostic Clinic (<http://ppdc.osu.edu>) for verification.

Work Order

A proper work order/proposal will include a diagram of the structure indicating the locations of any visible termite damage. The diagram also should indicate utility accesses, porches, wood-to-soil contact, drainage problems, and the treatment recommended for each portion of the house. The company should provide a written statement of the work proposed and the cost quotation.

Treatment Options

The company should be willing and able to discuss the proposed treatment. There currently are many treatment options for termite control. Refer to OSU Extension fact sheet HYG-2092-03 (Termite Control) (<http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/2000/2092.html>) for a discussion of soil termiticides (barrier or treated-zone), baits, and other alternatives. For more in-depth information on termite baits refer to OSU Extension fact sheet HYG-2092A-03 (<http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/2000/2092A.html>). A corrective treatment for termites will not eliminate carpenter ant or powderpost beetle infestations.

In order to compare among proposed services and prices, ask each company to specify, in writing, the name of the termite control product to be used. You may want to review the label and the material safety data sheet (MSDS) for each product. For soil termiticides, ask the company to provide information regarding the concentration to be used, the estimated gallons to be applied, treatment locations and methods, and approximate hours needed to complete the job. For baits, ask the company to provide information regarding the number of stations to be installed, where the stations will be located, and the inspection schedule.

For soil termiticides, the chemical is purchased in concentrated form then is diluted with water for application. The amount of chemical to be applied is determined by the size of the home and

type of construction (i.e., basement, concrete slab, crawl space, etc.). A soil treatment for a typical single-family home usually requires two technicians to work several hours to a full day. A shallow trench is dug along the foundation where soil abuts the house, then the chemical is applied into the trench and deeper into the soil by rodding. Cement patios, steps, and other pavement abutting the foundation are drilled to allow treatment of underlying soil. It may be necessary to drill and treat the hollow block foundation walls. All treatment holes subsequently should be securely plugged. Special treatment precautions are required for homes with wells, particular drainage systems, or in-slab or sub-slab heating ducts.

It is very important that bait systems are properly installed and diligently serviced. This often requires a monthly inspection schedule (except during inclement winter weather). With a bait treatment, in-ground plastic stations are inserted in the soil next to the structure and in the vicinity of known or suspected sites of termite activity. In-ground stations often initially contain untreated wood that serves as a monitoring device. When termites are detected feeding on the monitoring wood, it is replaced with a material that is toxic to the termites. As the termites continue to feed, the colony is affected. In addition, baited above ground stations may be installed inside or on the structure in the vicinity of damaged wood and shelter tubes. The baiting process may take months to years. Some bait systems are used in conjunction with a localized soil treatment.

Contracts

Once you engage a particular company, you probably will be asked to sign a work contract. It is important to understand clearly what obligations are assumed and what benefits are received in return. It is customary for a company to back its termite control work with a service agreement for a specified time. However, a service agreement is no better than the firm that presents it. Understand the service agreement offered and if it only vaguely refers to termite control, be suspicious. Determine if a yearly charge will be levied during the agreement period or whether these charges are included in the initial price. Ask what is needed to keep the service agreement in force. Determine if the firm will notify you when inspections are due.

Beware of Companies That:

- Cannot show proof of licensing by the Ohio Department of Agriculture.
- Cannot show proof of liability and property damage insurance.
- Use unlisted telephone numbers and addresses.
- Fail to address your questions and concerns professionally and to your satisfaction.
- Use scare/alarm tactics and/or forceful sales tactics to pressure you to immediately sign a contract.

- Appear at your door uninvited, unannounced, or unexpectedly, and show evidence of termite specimens and damage from a neighbor's property as an excuse to inspect your home.
- Claim to have a secret formula or chemical ingredient more potent than any other firm.
- Slander other pest management companies by indicating that their products are illegal and do not provide control.
- Quote prices over the phone without having performed a thorough inspection of your premises.
- Submit a quotation substantially lower than those of other firms contacted. The cheapest estimate often is not the best deal for the homeowner.
- Claim to "insulate" your premises against termite invasion.
- Claim that a corrective treatment for termites will eliminate carpenter ant or powderpost beetle infestations
- Indicate that excess chemical is left over from another job and a special price can be offered for immediate treatment of your home.
- Claim to be endorsed by a city, state, or national pest management association, The Ohio State University, Ohio Department of Agriculture, Ohio Department of Health, Environmental Protection Agency, or other government agencies.
- Offer a "discount" or "commission" for leads on other jobs.

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Keith L. Smith, Associate Vice President for Ag. Adm. and Director, OSU Extension

TDD No. 800-589-8292 (Ohio only) or 614-292-1868

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