

Questions & Answers About

Termites



Department of Consumer Affairs
Structural Pest Control Board



The Structural Pest Control Board (SPCB) licenses and regulates businesses and individuals for pest control. Licensees must meet minimum qualifications and levels of competency to provide safe and effective services to the public. Licenses can be verified online at www.pestboard.ca.gov.

STATE OF CALIFORNIA



DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

What are termites?

Termites are small white, tan, or black insects that can cause severe destruction to wooden buildings. Termite pests in California include drywood, dampwood, and subterranean species. These pests cause serious damage to wooden structures and posts and may also attack stored food, books, and household furniture.



If you see these signs in your house, you may have termites:

- Sawdust-like piles near wood surfaces or elongated, pellet-shaped droppings.
- Dirt or mud-like tubes or trails on outside walls, wooden beams or in crawl spaces. The mud tubes are typically about the diameter of a pencil, but sometimes can be thicker.
- Darkening or blistering of wooden structural members (like windowsills). Wood in damaged areas is typically thin, may sound hollow, and easily punctured with a knife or screwdriver.
- Swarming winged insects inside the structure, especially in the spring or fall. Swarms of termites emerging from trees stumps, woodpiles, and other locations in the yard do not necessarily mean the house is infested. However, if winged termites are seen emerging from the base of a foundation wall or adjoining porches and patios, there's a good chance the house is also infested.
- People often confuse winged termites with ants which may swarm at the same time of year. Termites have straight antennae, uniform waists and wings of equal size. Ants have elbowed antennae, constricted waists and forewings that are longer than the hind wings.

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Sometimes there will be no sign the home is infested. Termite infestations can go undetected for years, hidden behind walls, floor coverings or insulation. Termite feeding and damage can even progress undetected in wood that is exposed because the outer surface is usually left intact.

If you think you have termites, usually it is advisable to hire a professional pest control company to carry out the inspection and control program. Before making an appointment, make sure the company is registered and in good standing by calling the Structural Pest Control Board (SPCB) at (916) 561-8708, or toll-free (800) 737-8188, or go to the SPCB Web site, www.pestboard.ca.gov.

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Termites damage wood slowly; the amount of damage caused by taking an extra day, week or month to make an informed decision is usually insignificant. Avoid firms that try to pressure you into signing a contract immediately with "specials" or scare tactics.

The overall quality of the job depends less on the salesperson than on the individual who does the work. A safe and effective treatment requires an experienced technician.

If the inspection finds evidence of drywood termites, you have several options, depending on the degree of infestation. Fumigation and heating of the entire house are the only choices that ensure eradication in the entire structure. If the infestation is contained in a small area, local or spot control may be effective; however, hidden infestations in other parts of the structure will not be eradicated.

For a summary of commercially available termite management options, and tips on how to prevent termites, go to <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu>, the University of California Integrated Pest Management Web site, click on "Homes, gardens," then type "termites" in the search box. Or go directly to **<http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7440.html>**.

Total (Whole-House) Eradication

There are two methods for total or whole-house eradication of drywood termites—fumigation and heat. For fumigation, you must remove all pets and plants and remove or seal medications and food. You must stay out of the house from six hours to one week, depending on the type of infestation, the size of the house and other factors. The house is then enclosed in a “tent” of vinyl-coated nylon tarps or sealed with plastic, tape, or other materials. The fumigator will post a sign on the property when it is safe to return.

NOTE: Subterranean termites require separate treatments to create a barrier between the building and their nest in the ground.

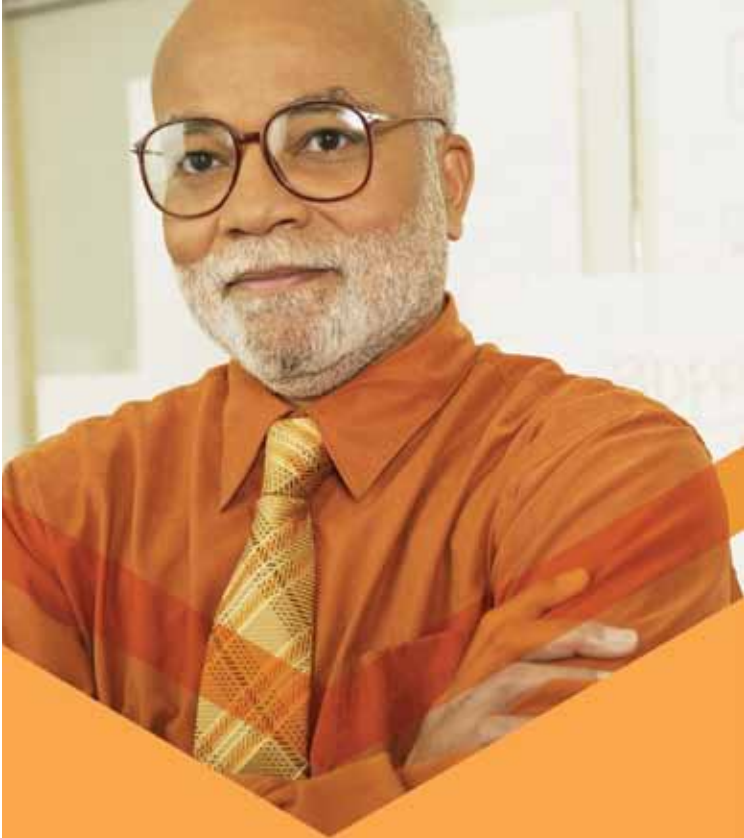
For the heat method, pets, plants, and other items that might be damaged by high temperatures must be removed. The house is then covered with tarps. Hot air is blown in until the inside temperature reaches 140° to 150°F and the temperature of the structural timbers reaches 120°F. The time to complete this procedure varies from one structure to another, depending on factors such as the building’s construction and the weather. The procedure may not be practical for structures that cannot be heated evenly.



Local or Spot Control

Local or spot control methods include the use of pesticides, electric current, extreme cold, localized heat, microwave energy, or any combination of these methods. Local or spot control also includes the removal and replacement of infested structural timber. These methods are intended to remove or kill termites only within the specific targeted area, leaving open the possibility of other undetected infestations within the structure. These treatments are NOT designed for whole-house eradication.

Any pest control company that claims whole-house results with local or spot control methods is guilty of false advertising and should be reported. Local or spot treatment with pesticides involves drilling and injecting pesticides into infested timbers as well as the topical application of toxic chemicals. The electric-current method involves delivering electric energy to targeted infestations. For the extreme-cold method, liquid nitrogen is pumped into wall voids next to suspected infestation sites, reducing the area to -20°F . The localized heat method involves heating infested structural timbers to 120°F . The microwave method kills termites by directing microwaves into termite-infested wood.



What can I do if I am not satisfied with the services of a structural pest control company?

If you are unhappy with the service, call the company and discuss your concerns. If the company does not resolve the problem to your satisfaction, you can contact SPCB for assistance. You can also download a complaint form from the SPCB Web site at www.pestboard.ca.gov.



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