

Termites

(Eastern Subterranean Termite – *Reticulitermes flavipes*)



Workers and soldiers (orange heads)



Swarmer: black body, long equal wings (VA)



Mud tubes on a block pier

Identification – You'll rarely see termites unless they swarm. The workers that do the damage are about 1/4 inch, cream-colored and soft, like little pieces of moving rice, and they stay hidden in the soil and wood. **Swarmers** are the ones people find: about 1/4 inch long, black, with two pairs of long, equal-length, milky wings that break off easily. Winged ants are the usual mix-up. Ants have a pinched waist, elbowed antennae and front wings longer than the back ones. Termites have a thick waist, straight antennae and wings all the same size.

Why they're a problem – Termites eat wood, hollowing it out from the inside while the surface looks fine. Our native subterranean termites nest in the soil and need its moisture, so they build mud tubes to travel up into the house and then tunnel inside the wood they're eating. Damage takes a long time to build up, so finding termites is a reason to act, not to panic; you have time to get a proper inspection and compare options.

What we find – Swarms happen once or twice a year, usually on warm spring days, to mate. Swarmers are weak fliers, but winds and air currents can carry them up to a mile from their colony, which is how the species spreads. Most die within hours. So swarmers outside, while concerning, don't by themselves mean a colony is damaging your home. Swarmers *inside*, piles of shed wings on sills, or mud tubes on the foundation, piers or joists are a different story. Many "termites" we're sent turn out to be ant swarmers, psocids or other insects, and a pile of fine dust is often a wood-boring beetle, not termites.

What works – What you need is a professional termite inspection and treatment. Termite work requires separate licensing and insurance, and **Dynamic does not perform termite treatments.** But we can identify what you found and help you figure out the right next step before you call a termite company, so you get the proper inspection and don't pay for work you don't need. If the house already has a termite warranty or bond, start there. Renewing or spot-treating under an existing warranty is usually far cheaper than having a new company re-treat the whole home.

What you can do – Save samples in a sealed bag or container, get a close, clear photo, and note where they were, whether inside or just outside. Check your closing papers or past bills for a termite warranty or bond on the house. Don't spend a lot of money based only on a swarm seen outside. Keep mulch, soil and firewood away from siding and wood trim, fix leaks and drainage problems, and don't let wood touch the soil.

When to call Dynamic – Call us any time you think you've seen termites, before you sign up for a termite inspection or treatment. If you're not sure whether it's a termite or a flying ant, send us a photo and we'll identify it for you.