Pennsylvania Carpenter Ants

(Black Carpenter Ant – *Camponotus pennsylvanicus*)

Worker (Woodbridge, VA)

Workers on a dead branch

Smooth galleries carved in soft wood

Identification – Carpenter ants are big, shiny black ants, 1/4 to 1/2 inch long, and winged swarmers can reach 3/4 inch. Size is the quickest way to tell them apart, since the odorous house ant and pavement ant, the other two ants we see most here, are only about 1/8 inch. Carpenter ants have a single node at the waist and elbowed antennae. Winged carpenter ants have a pinched waist and a front wing longer than the back one, while termite swarmers have a thick waist and wings of equal length.

Why they're a problem – Customers hear "carpenter ant" and picture the house falling down. **Carpenter ants don't eat wood;** they just hollow it out to nest in. They go after wood that's rotten, wet or very soft, because it's easier to chew, and they don't normally nest in fresh or hard wood. A nest inside the house almost always means there's a moisture problem somewhere, and that's worth finding.

What we find – Most of the time, they're nesting outside in a wood pile, a stump, a dead tree or other wet, decaying wood, and coming inside to forage for food. When they are nesting in the house, we look where wood stays wet: leaky roofs, gutters and windows, porch posts, and around showers and tubs. Carpenter ants come out mostly at night. Signs of a nest include piles of coarse sawdust-like shavings mixed with dead insect parts below a crack, or swarmers inside in spring. Plenty of ants get called carpenter ants that aren't, so we check before we treat.

What works – **Find the wood they're living in.** Carpenter ants don't act like the ants that trail in from the lawn, so a standard ant treatment isn't enough. The nest has to be found and treated directly, both the main colony outside and any satellite nests in the house, or they come back. Fixing the leak and replacing the wet or rotted wood is part of the job.

What you can do – Move firewood away from the house and off the ground, and remove stumps, logs and scrap wood near the house. Fix leaks in roofs, gutters, downspouts, windows and plumbing, and replace wood that stays wet or soft. Trim trees and shrubs so branches don't touch the house. It also helps to watch where the ants go at night with a flashlight, especially in late spring and summer, because that trail leads to the nest. And save a sample; even a squashed ant can usually be identified.

When to call Dynamic – Give us a call if you see large black ants inside regularly, find winged ants indoors, or spot piles of wood shavings. If you're not sure whether it's a carpenter ant, a smaller ant or a termite, send us a photo and we'll identify it for you.