

PROTECTING YOURSELF AND YOUR PROPERTY AGAINST SUBTERRANEAN TERMITES

A Guide for Consumer Protection



**STATE OF FLORIDA
DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE AND
CONSUMER SERVICES**

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Termites are a Serious Problem in Florida

Wood-destroying organisms, such as termites, are a very serious problem in Florida. They attack and damage any building material that contains cellulose, such as wood used in house and building construction, drywall covered with paper, or siding materials containing cellulose. The pests commonly encountered in Florida include subterranean termites, dry-wood termites, and several wood-destroying beetles.

One of the most prevalent and dangerous wood-destroying organisms is the subterranean termite, which can cause significant wood damage to a house and other structures. The termite's activity generally goes unnoticed until extensive damage becomes visible, and the economic impact is substantial.

Why are termites a problem now?

For many years, up to 1988, the use of chlordane or similar pesticides to treat the soil prior to finishing the foundation was an effective means of controlling termites and protecting the wood in a structure.

This situation changed dramatically in April 1988, when the use of chlordane and similar pesticides was stopped due to

concerns about environmental and human health effects. These products were replaced with pesticides considered to be safer for the environment and human health. But these characteristics also made the products less effective for termite protection. While chlordane generally lasted more than 30 years, currently available materials last on the order of five to fifteen years, and require more precise application.

What can the homeowner do to protect against termites?

Houses and other wood structures can be protected from termites only if they are constructed and maintained properly, and a protective treatment is applied correctly. If you are having a house built, make sure that termite protection is considered in the design and construction of the house. Also make sure that your general contractor has a qualified pest control company provide termite protection treatment during appropriate stages of construction.

Proper termite protection treatment during construction typically requires at least two separate applications, and may require several more. Ask your builder how your house is being protected from termites.

If your house is already built, there are still many things you can do to enhance your termite protection:

- # Maintain your termite treatment contract by renewing it annually and insist on an annual inspection.
- # Keep any wood-based items, such as firewood, scrap lumber, fencing and planter boxes, from coming in contact with exterior siding. Do not store firewood in the garage.
- # Keep siding materials (except masonry and brick) at least 6 - 8 inches above ground level. If your siding materials extend into the ground, discuss the situation with your pest control company to determine the best way to prevent termites from entering the structure.
- # Make sure that wood mulch used for landscaping is not in contact with siding.
- # Divert sprinkler water away from exterior walls and foundation.
- # Divert air conditioner condensation lines away from exterior walls and foundation.
- # Promptly repair any water leaks and moisture problems in the roof, attic, walls, bathroom and sink areas.
- # Maintain gutters and downspouts, and keep splash blocks in place to keep water from disturbing the termiticide protective barrier around the foundation.
- # Periodically inspect exterior wood door and window frames and moldings for blistered paint and soft spots that might indicate termite damage.
- # Every few months, inspect foundation walls for subterranean termite mud or shelter tubes. If you find any, call the pest control company that has your termite protection contract as soon as possible for a re-inspection.

Working with a Pest Control Operator

Termite protection chemicals (termiticides) can only be used by state-licensed pest control applicators. Termiticides must be applied in a way that establishes a continuous, unbroken barrier between wood in a structure and termites in the soil.

Florida law requires that a contract be issued whenever a termite treatment is conducted.

Contracts covering soil treatments for protection against subterranean termites while a house is under construction must state that if a termite infestation occurs in, on or under the structure during the warranty period, additional treatment will be made to the soil in the infested area. The warranty must be valid for a year and offer the homeowner the option to extend the contract annually for an additional four years. Many pest control companies offer a repair warranty as well, which will cover the cost of repair to the structure if termite infestation occurs during the term of the contract. You should ask your builder what kind of warranty is offered in the contract and obtain a copy of the contract.

Post Construction Contracts and Warranties

Contracts and warranties for post-construction treatment vary from company to company. However, the use of some terms in a contract have been specified in law (Chap. 482.227, F.S.).

- # A “full” or “unlimited” guarantee or warranty means the pest control company promises to restore any property damaged by the covered wood-destroying organism during a specified period after the treatment.
- # A “limited” guarantee or warranty means the pest control company promises only to provide additional treatment if an infestation occurs during a specified period after treatment.
- # The terms “guarantee” or “warranty” may **not** be used in a contract, except in disclaimer, if the pest control company does not promise to restore the property or provide additional treatment if an infestation occurs after treatment.

Furthermore, any statement disclaiming an expressed or implied guarantee or warranty must appear in conspicuous type on the face of the contract.

The duration of post-construction contracts and warranties can vary from one year to five years, depending on the policy of the pest control company.

Normally, the annual renewal fee will remain the same during the term of the contract.

Remember, if you do not renew your contract, it automatically becomes null and void, and you have lost your protection. Read any contract carefully before signing.

For information about wood-destroying organisms, and termite treatment, contracts and warranties, contact one of the regional offices of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Bureau of Entomology and Pest Control.

Information is also available at the Department's web site - <http://www.floridatermitehelp.org>

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Counties Served

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