

Keeping termites at bay

Timber Inspection Branch

There are many approaches to controlling termites in buildings.

Many books, pamphlets and even Australian Standards have been published about termite control. This Primefact is not intended as a complete authority on what to do but rather to give a brief overview of the main approaches to controlling termites in buildings.

Effective action to protect buildings from termite attack falls into two areas:

1. Eradication of an existing attack to the building, and
2. Prevention of an attack to the building.

1. Eradication of an existing attack

In most cases (but not all) the nest of termites attacking the building can be eradicated by the pest controller by:

- introducing a small amount of termiticide dust into the termite workings; and/or
- applying a baiting system directly to the termite workings.

In some cases where sufficient termites have *not* been found and it is not possible for a baiting system to be applied direct to the termite workings, a bait box may be installed near the termite activity in an attempt to encourage sufficient termites into the box so that they can be treated by introducing termiticide dusts or a baiting system.

Where sufficient termites *have* been found, direct treatment may be the best approach.

The feeding process that termites use distributes the termiticide to other colony members and will eventually be fed to the queen. When the queen dies the nest dies because, unlike bees, most species of termites are unable to produce a replacement queen.

It is not necessary to find the actual termite nest. The nest may be in the subfloor area of the building, in a nearby tree or across the street. The pest controller who introduces the termiticide will need to do a follow-up inspection as directed by the label attached to the termiticide used and may, in some cases, need to apply further treatment.

Where a termite attack has occurred, it is preferable to eradicate the existing attack before installing measures to prevent future attack.

Notes

- Some termiticide dusts are contact poisons, so they kill the termites on contact. They will not eliminate a colony unless they are being used to treat the actual nest when it can be found.
- The term **baiting system** has been used to describe systems that contain a termiticide that the termites actually feed on. The term **bait box** has been used to describe a system that contains materials that termites like to eat, such as cardboard, radiata pine or Tasmanian oak, where a termiticide may be added at a later date should sufficient termites begin to feed on the bait material.

2. Prevention of an attack

Prevention of attack involves placing a chemical or physical barrier, or a combination of both, between the potential threat of termites and the building.

Chemical barriers include spraying the area on which a concrete slab is to be laid, under the concrete slab, trenching and treating the soil around the edge of the slab, or treating the soil around footings and piers.

Physical barriers include the slab itself, stainless steel mesh under the slab, crushed granite (of a certain size) under the slab or around services or in cavities, and ant capping on top of piers and in brick walls.

Most physical and chemical barriers rely on regular visual inspection.

For example, ant capping does not prevent termite attack. If they want to, termites will build mud runs around the capping. Regular visual inspections will detect these mud runs and termiticide dusts and/or baits can be used to eradicate the attacking nest.

Where a chemical barrier has been placed under a slab or the slab has been used as a barrier, the slab edge should remain exposed for its entire length. Regular inspection of the slab edge may detect termite entry.

Where the slab edge cannot be seen, chemical barriers can be placed in the soil around the slab edge. Chemical barriers have varying life spans and need to be renewed. The chemical barrier should not be disturbed or bridged, for example by building gardens on top, as termites could then gain entry unseen. Alternatively when the building is under construction, specifically designed stainless steel mesh or granite pebbles can be installed in the wall cavity above the edge of the slab.

If eradication using termiticide dusts and/or baits is necessary, it is essential that the termites remain as undisturbed as possible and that **no** preventative measures are undertaken until the termiticide dust and/or baiting program has had a chance to work. Both chemical and physical barriers keep termites *in* buildings as well as *out of* buildings and the termites must be able to transfer the termiticide dust back to the queen for the eradication of the nest to be successful.

Site hygiene

It is important to keep the building surrounds free of materials that provide easy access for termite attack.

Rubble and old timber stored under or beside the building, lattice work or even non-timber infill panelling between external piers (perhaps to keep

out animals), in fact almost anything that connects the building to ground exposes the structure to attack. Gardens against the building, plants (such as ivy) growing over the building and such things as leaking plumbing and poor subfloor ventilation all increase the risk.

It is certainly possible to erect a building with a framework of termite-resistant material.

While this will protect the structural components of the building, termites can still eat other cellulose products such as cardboard, books, furnishings and even the paper surface of plasterboard.

Further advice about termites or other timber pests may be obtained from:

Timber Inspection Service

Ph: (02) 9872 0179

Fax: (02) 9872 9093

Email: timberinspection@sf.nsw.gov.au

Web: www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/forests/business-services/timber-inspection

Further information

For further information about state forests please contact:

Forests NSW Information Centre
Cumberland State Forest
95 Castle Hill Rd, West Pennant Hills
NSW 2125

PO Box 100, Beecroft NSW 2119

Ph: 1300 655 687 or 02 9871 3377

Fax: 02 9872 6447

email: cumberland@sf.nsw.gov.au

website: www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/forests

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