



# How to Select a Termite Control Service



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**R**etaining the services of a competent termite control company is important because termite control requires specialized equipment and knowledge available only from professionals.

Termites, which are wood-destroying insects common in most areas of Texas, cause many millions of dollars of damage annually. Texas has two major types of termites: subterranean termites, which live in the soil and are found throughout the state; and drywood termites, which attack sound, dry wood and are most abundant in coastal areas.

Wooden structures in Texas have more than a 70 percent chance of being attacked by termites within 10 to 20 years. Termites may even begin attacking soon after construction. Properly treating the soil beneath and around the foundation with termiticidal chemicals before construction, called a pretreatment, reduces the threat of subterranean termites. However, because few areas



Termites may even begin attacking a home soon after construction.

in Texas have ordinances requiring pretreatments, only a small percentage of homeowners enjoy such security from termite problems.

Some helpful Extension publications on this subject, B-6080, "Subterranean Termites," L-1782, "Drywood Termites," and L-5233, "Formosan Subterranean Termites," discuss the identification, biology, behavior and control of these insects.

If you suspect you have a termite infestation, the following steps will help you select a termite control service:

■ *Don't panic.*

Termites work slowly, so your house will not collapse or be ruined overnight. Do not become unduly alarmed if you learn that termites are, or may be, attacking your home.

■ *Take your time.*

Do not permit anyone to rush you into buying termite control services. Take the time you need to make an informed decision. Delaying a few weeks makes no difference. There is always time to buy this service wisely and at your convenience.



Homes are prime targets for termites.

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Time is obviously more pressing if you are trying to sell your home and a real estate transaction is pending. If the infestation was discovered with enough time before closing on the transaction, a treatment can still be chosen and performed to the satisfaction of the buyer, seller and mortgage company. Closing can also be postponed temporarily until the treatment is completed, although this is usually not preferred by the parties concerned.

- *If you are unsure about whether your home has termites, locate reliable pest control firms and discuss their termite control services.*

Arrange for a thorough termite inspection, knowing that the costs of inspections, estimates and terms can vary significantly among companies. Request inspections from three or more companies. Ask for recommendations from friends and neighbors; this is one of the best ways to get an honest opinion about a termite control service.

A proper inspection should include a written report noting:

- The location of areas of active or inactive termite infestations;
  - The location and number of treatments to be made to control the infestation. A diagram of the structure should be included, which is extremely helpful in indicating the location of structural features such as porches, utility accesses and areas of wood-to-soil contact, as well as areas with drainage or moisture problems in or near the structure.
  - An estimated cost of control. Determine whether the estimate is a firm price, and be cautious if it is not. If you decide to obtain more than one opinion, quote or inspection, let each firm involved know that other firms were contacted. As the consumer, you are free to shop, but treat the companies with the same courtesy and respect you hope they will return as pest control professionals.
- *Understand the various treatment methods or options.*

Consumers shopping for termite control services have more choices than ever before. This is good, but it can also be confusing. Options include baits and soil barriers for subterranean termites, and fumigants and heat for drywood termites.



Request a termite inspection from at least three companies.

## Baits versus soil barriers

One of the first decisions you will have to make is whether to treat using a termite bait or a conventional soil barrier treatment. Both approaches can be effective. Soil treatments are used to establish a “barrier” or “treatment zone” between the wood in the structure and the subterranean termite colonies in the soil. The chemicals may either kill or repel the invading termites, but either way the structure is protected if the applications are thorough. Chemical treatments should last at least 5 years under Texas soil and environmental conditions.

## Baiting systems

Several choices in baiting systems are available from termite control services. Using baiting systems requires that the applicator have specific knowledge to apply the baits correctly. It also demands continual monitoring. Some baiting systems are advertised to be able to stand alone, or be totally sufficient for termite control; others are used in combination with liquid termiticides.

In general, baits require several trips to the job site for installation and monitoring. Control may take from a few weeks to more than a year.

## Soil barriers

For the **sub-slab method**, holes are drilled in a concrete slab and pesticide is injected through a tube into the soil beneath the slab. This method is used inside the structure, mainly where pipes protrude through the slab, as in bathrooms and kitchens. Injection also may be required along both sides of interior support walls, one side of interior partitions and along all cracks and expansion joints.

At times the pesticide must be injected through exterior foundation walls just beneath the slab, such as when treating kitchens and bathrooms from the outside. To ensure a good, continuous chemical barrier, the holes should be drilled in the slab no farther than 12 inches apart.

**Trenching** involves excavating a 6- to 8-inch-wide, 10-inch-deep strip of soil next to the outside foundation wall on slab homes. The process must remove all the soil from against the foundation. Homes on pier-and-beam foundations are trenched by excavating soil in an area 6 to 8 inches wide around all piers and pipes and along inside and outside foundation walls.

Trenching takes longer, but provides a better, more consistent barrier than rodding alone. Make sure that all soil returned to the trench is treated with termiticide.

**Rodding** uses a long rod with a special tip to penetrate the soil. The rod is usually inserted about every 12 inches. If applied properly, the pesticide creates a continuous barrier; however, using rodding alone is not recommended because it leaves gaps in the treatment zone. Rodding combined with trenching is preferred.

**Combinations** are sometimes used involving all three of the above methods. Sub-slab injection may be used on porches, patios, breezeways, driveways and entryways where separate slabs



A rotary hammer drill is used to drill holes for the sub-slab method of termite treatment.

exist. Bath-trap areas of slab homes and areas where plumbing and electrical lines enter the home can be treated by sub-slab injection or rodding

**Foam**, a relatively new technology, is used to apply termiticide to various construction features of a home. This formulation should be used to treat difficult areas such as chimney bases, dirt-filled porches and certain sub-slab areas. It is not



Termiticide is injected in drill holes.

suitable or effective for treating the soil directly. Liquid applications should be made first and then foam should be used as a secondary application method.

## Alternative management

**Sand barriers** are an alternative to chemicals. In some parts of the world, sand with certain size particles (1/16 inch) is used to physically block termite entry into structures. It is not approved for use in Texas. The technology requires considerable knowledge on the part of the applicator, and is generally unsuitable for use outdoors around the base of a foundation unless the sand barrier can be held in place.

**Fumigants** are used to treat drywood termites, which do not need contact with the soil and can attack dry, sound wood. To control drywood termites, a structure is usually covered completely with tarps. The seams of tarps are sealed, and a fumigant is introduced. The fumigant is maintained in the structure long enough to eliminate the termites. The tarps are then removed and the structure aerated before people are allowed to return. The fumigant is very effective, but after the aeration, no residual is left to control subsequent infestations.

Other control methods include removing damaged wood containing the drywood colony, or drilling and treating wood where colonies are located. These methods can be effective, but for major infestations, fumigation is recommended.

**Heat** is an alternative treatment approved for use in Texas on drywood termites and wood-infesting beetles. It is not approved in Texas to treat subterranean termites.

■ *Contract for services from a reliable firm.*

Choose a termite control service with the same care and discrimination you would use in securing any other service for your property.

Always be sure you deal with a reliable firm that is both licensed and certified to do the work and that has an established place of business. Here are some ways to investigate before you invest:

- Ask for identification confirming that the person offering termite control is licensed by the Texas Structural Pest Control Board. Texas has a pesticide use and applicator law under which all commercial pest control firms must operate. Certified applicators and technicians must carry identification issued by the board, and service vehicles must have Texas Pest Control License numbers permanently affixed to the vehicle on each front fender and/or front door panel in 2-inch letters in a color contrasting with the background color. Magnetic numbers and letters are not considered to be permanently affixed. Contracts (and certain other documents) must have the following stamped or printed on them:

**Licensed and Regulated by the:  
Structural Pest Control Board of Texas,  
1106 Clayton Lane, Suite 100LW,  
Austin, TX 78723-1066,  
512/451-7200**

(see example at the end of this publication)



Fumigation is used to treat drywood termites.

- If a firm offers references of previous work, take time to check them carefully.
- If the firm is located in your area, make sure it has an established place of business, which can be checked through the Chamber of Commerce or Better Business Bureau.
- If the firm is from out of town, it is even more important to make sure it is reliable. Check that it has an established place of business in the town where it claims to be located. Most fraudulent operators work in communities where they are not known. Ask for references and check them carefully. Reliable firms welcome this approach.
- *Beware of firms that:*
  - Quote a price based only on the number of gallons of material used.
  - Profess to have a secret formula or ingredient for termite control (all termiticides must be registered by the Environmental Protection Agency).
  - Have no listed telephone number.
  - Show up unexpectedly and use evidence of termites in trees or other nearby houses as an excuse to inspect the house.
  - Also want to trim trees and do general foundation repair work as part of the “deal.”
  - Cater to elderly or infirm people who live alone (relatives and neighbors should warn elderly people to beware of people who knock at the door and propose to do service work, including treating the house for termites).
  - Claim to be endorsed by Texas A&M University or any other state agency.
  - Claim to have excess chemical left over from another job and offer a reduced price if they can do the treatment immediately. Texas requires a three-day “cooling off” period to protect consumers in any home solicitation.
- *Know the Structural Pest Control Board requirements for inspections and treatments.*

Inspections conducted to establish the need for treatment may be made using the company’s form; however, inspections made for a real estate transaction must be reported on the “Texas Official Wood Destroying Insect Report” form, SPCB/T-3. With the latter type of inspection, a durable sign must be posted at or near the water heater closet, electric breaker box, under the kitchen sink, or the interior of the bath trap access. This sign must give the date of inspection

and name and address of the licensee who conducted it.

Before conducting a termite treatment, the pest control company proposing the treatment must present you with disclosure documents containing at least the following:

- A diagram and description of the structure or structures to be treated.
  - The name of the termiticide(s) to be used along with a label for the termiticides.
  - Information on whether or not a warranty or service contract is provided.
  - Complete details of the warranty provided, including:
    - ✓ Areas excluded from treatment, if any.
    - ✓ Warranty time period.
    - ✓ Renewal option(s) and cost(s).
    - ✓ Obligations to retreat or repair damage caused by termites within the warranty period.
    - ✓ Conditions that could develop as a result of the owner's action or inaction that could void the warranty.
    - ✓ Signature of approval by a certified applicator representing the company offering termite control services.
- *Find out if they are members of a pest control association.*

Membership in the Texas Pest Control Association is evidence that a firm has an established place of business, ascribes to a code of ethics and has access to technical literature for training and consultation. For the association's membership list, write to: Executive Director, Texas Pest Control Association, 100 E. Anderson, Suite 325, Austin, TX 78752, 512/835-2801, or to the National Pest Control Association, 8100 Oak St., Dunn Loring, VA 22027, 703/573-8330.

Some pest control professionals are board-certified entomologists (B.C.E.) through the Entomological Society of America, and are usually college graduates with a degree in entomology and appropriate academic training.

- *Know the terms of the contract.*

Ask the termite control specialist to provide a written statement of the proposed work and a cost estimate, along with the required disclosure documents. The specialist must give you time to consider the estimate.

It is customary to provide a warranty on termite control work, either on a year-to-year basis or for a more extended period. Plan to extend the

warranty for at least the first 2 or 3 years after the treatment is made. Make sure you know exactly what warranty the firm offers. When choosing a company, compare the warranties carefully. A warranty is a guarantee of service, not a guarantee of the termite barrier. Most companies do not offer a damage repair warranty; some companies do offer it on any new or subsequent infestation and damage.

Read the warranty carefully. Do not accept guarantees that vaguely refer to termite control. Determine whether a yearly charge will be levied during the warranty period, or whether these charges are included in the initial price. Find out how much it will cost to extend the warranty for additional years and ask how long it can be extended. Make sure you get copies of the contract and warranty for your records.

Remember that a warranty is no better than the person or firm who gives it to you. A warranty should not be the only evidence you consider to determine that a firm is reliable. Many fraudulent operators use a showy contract and warranty as part of their sales promotion.

You will probably be asked to sign a work order or contract when you hire a firm for termite work. Understand clearly what obligations you are assuming and what you will get in return. As required by law, the name, address, and telephone number of the Structural Pest Control Board of Texas must appear on the face of each contract, warranty or guarantee issued by the pest control operator.

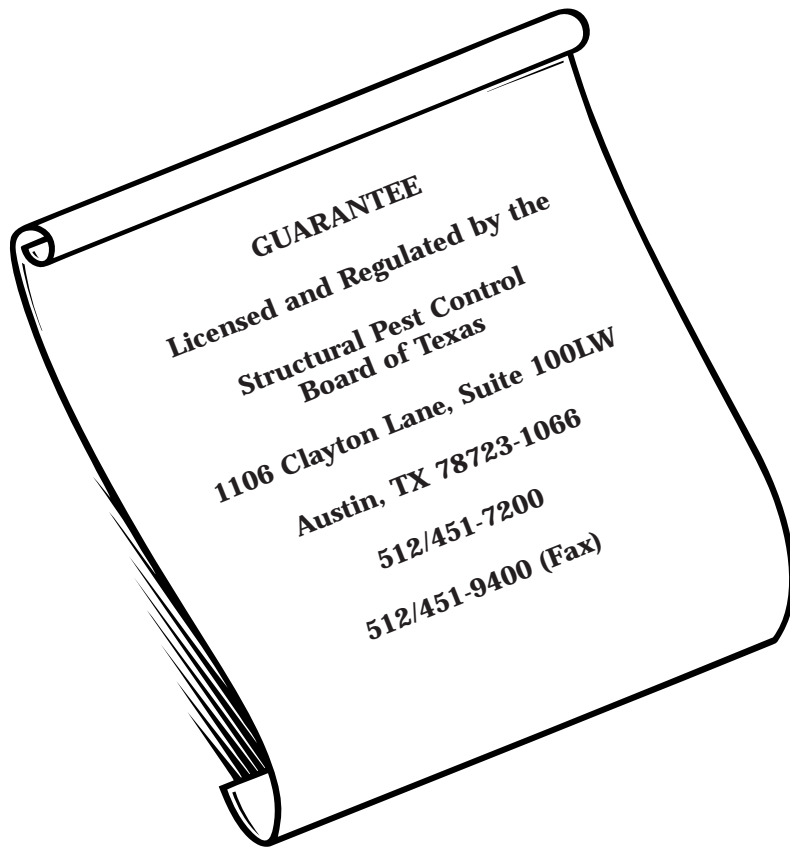
When the termite treatment is completed, the company must leave a durable sign at or near the water heater closet, electric breaker box or beneath the kitchen sink. The sign contains the name and address of the company, the date of the treatment and a statement that the notice must remain in place.

- *Most firms are reliable, legitimate businesses respected in their communities.*

Fraudulent operators, on the other hand, aim only to swindle people out of their money. Web sites that may be helpful to you are listed at the end of this publication.

If you believe that you have been the subject of fraudulent business practices, contact the Structural Pest Control Board of Texas or the Office of the Texas Attorney General - Consumer Protection Division at (512) 463-2185 or (800) 621-0508. There are no charges to the consumer to receive help from these state agencies.

Example of statement required on contracts:



## **WEB SITES**

**Texas Structural Pest Control Board:**  
**<http://www.spcb.capnet.state.tx.us/>**

**Texas Pest Control Association:**  
**<http://www.texaspest.org/>**

**National Pest Control Association:**  
**<http://www.pestworld.org/>**

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