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UNL Extension Programs Have Improved Termite Treatments in Nebraska

Barb Ogg
UNL Extension Educator

A few years after she bought her home, a Lincoln homeowner noticed the paint in her laundry room was peeling. She thought it was odd, but wasn't concerned because it wasn't a room guests would see. She was busy remodeling and decorating the other rooms, and it was the last room on her list. In 2003, she finally decided to tackle the paint problem.

To her dismay, she started peeling the paint off the wall and found termite “mud” behind the paint (Fig. 1). The termites had completely eaten the paper off



Figure 1. Termite “mud” behind wall paint.

the drywall. Little did she know this was just the “tip of the iceberg.” A professional inspection revealed damage to the home was extensive. The beam to the second floor was completely broken through (Fig. 2). Total cost to repair the damage to her home was approximately \$30,000.



Figure 2. Termite damage to floor beam.

This situation is unusual in Nebraska because there are usually signs of termites before damage becomes so great. It is important to know what the signs are (see page 5 of this issue).

The average value of a termite treatment is more than \$1,500. Unfortunately, there are no effective do-it-yourself treatments for homeowners. If termites are found, homeowners need to hire pest control professionals who are knowledgeable and skilled in termite treatments. It does pay for homeowners to research all the options and become informed before making a decision.

University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension has developed a two-pronged approach to improve the overall quality and cost-effectiveness of termite treatments done in Nebraska. An annual series of workshops educates homeowners and a hands-on termite school trains pest control professionals.

Homeowners Workshop

The workshop “Everything Homeowners Need to Know About Termites and Termite Control” educates homeowners to recognize the signs of termites, understand different treatment types, understand why quality treatments are expensive and how to make sure they get the quality treatment they want.

Most of the workshops have been held in Lincoln and Omaha, but it has also been presented in Auburn, Beatrice, Columbus, Fremont, Grand Island, Hastings, Lexington, Nebraska City, Norfolk, Wilber and York. More than 1,600 homeowners and 164 real estate licensees have attended since 1995.

A post-workshop survey of attendees found:

- 98 percent said they obtained information needed to better protect their property.
- 93 percent received a good quality termite treatment at a fair price.
- 87 percent were less apprehensive about working with a pest control company.
- 82 percent said they saved money after attending this program (average savings was \$312/person).

Some of the testimonials include:

- “This [workshop] is a wonderful public service! It has given me peace of mind and confidence as a homeowner.”
- “This class was very informational and all of the speakers gave great presentations.... I would recommend this class to anyone purchasing a home.”
- “The most valuable information that I received at the workshop was the proper technique for termite control applications. This helped me inspect the work of my pest control company.”
- “This course should be mandatory for all real estate licensees in continuing education requirements” [from a real estate licensee].

The 2007 workshops will be held in Omaha (May 3), Weeping Water (May 15) and Lincoln (May 17), see page 5 for more information. Many termite resources for homeowners are available online at <http://lancaster.unl.edu/pest>.

Hands-On Termite School for Professionals

As a result of the homeowners workshop, enlightened homeowners have barraged the Nebraska Department of Agriculture — the pesticide regulating agency in Nebraska — about questionable treatments they have received. In ensuing investigations, NDA uncovered compliance problems; some resulted from entry-level pest control professionals not being given adequate training by their companies.

In 2005 and 2006, UNL Extension organized a termite school for entry-level termite application professionals. This intensive, 15-hour training program used both classroom and on-site demonstra-



Figure 3. (L–R) Extension Educators Dennis Ferraro, Clyde Ogg and Barb Ogg answer questions at a 2004 Workshop for Homeowners.

tions. Real homes with termite damage were used to show termite damage and actual application methods to different parts of the structure.

Presenters included UNL faculty, NDA personnel and industry professionals. Companies helping with the training included Dow AgroSciences, Bayer Environmental Sciences, BASF Corporation, Nisus Corp., B&G Equipment Company and UnivarUSA.



Figure 4. Gary Branses of Bayer demonstrates to participants how insecticide spreads in soil.

More than 70 people attended — most were pest control professionals, but some were construction workers or home inspectors.

Attendees reported:

- 94 percent were better able to calibrate termiticide application equipment.
- 93 percent were less likely to violate label directions.
- 92 percent were more confident in being able to identify termite damage.
- 75 percent said they would change methods of inspecting or treating. Changes included taking more time to inspect, looking more carefully at how the house is constructed and treating drain tile differently.

- Some of the testimonials include: “I have more confidence my treatments will be done right and know my customers are getting a good job.”
- “Your school will aid in reducing regulatory action, reduce on-the-job injuries, increase consumer satisfaction and increase application performance among all who take this class.”

The 2007 Termite School will be held Sept. 25–26 in Lincoln. For more information about this training, contact Barb Ogg at bogg1@unl.edu or (402) 441-7180.