Bids for the same termite treatment can range from $500 to $1500 or more. How is it possible for some companies to charge one-half, one-third or less of what others will charge? The answer is that the companies will not be treating in exactly the same way, even though they may try to convince you that they will be doing an equivalent (or superior) treatment. Common sense says that if termite treatment companies are treating exactly the same way, with the same termiticide, they should be charging roughly the same price—at least the bids should be in the same order of magnitude. It is up to you, the consumer, to get these details in writing and to try to figure out where the treatments will differ. Afterwards it may be too late.

Termiticide labels tell the termite control applicator how the product should be used for maximum effectiveness. Information on the label includes a statement of practical treatment, in case of accidental exposure, precautionary statements, hazards to humans and domestic animals, personal protective equipment that should be used when using the chemical, environmental hazards, directions for use and storage and disposal information. The directions for use include application concentrations (how much termiticide is added to water), volumes to be used, (usually expressed in gallons per linear feet), injection hole spacings, locations of treatments, precautions that should be taken, and other important details that may affect the effectiveness of the product.

Like any other legal document, you should read the label carefully.

It is very important for the applicator to read and understand the label directions, but it is equally important for the customer to read the label to understand how the treatment is to be done.

It is important to understand the nuances of words that are used. When the label requires a specific action, the words must, do not, or required are used. The following examples are interpreted as requirements.

“...the applicator MUST trench and rod into the trench or trench along the foundations walls and around pillars and other foundation elements.” This language means that the applicator must do some trenching when doing a foundation treatment. Further examination of the label may give more details about trenching that must be done.

“After application, the applicator is REQUIRED to check for leaks. All leaks resulting in the deposition of termiticide in locations other than those prescribed on this label MUST be cleaned up prior to leaving the application site.” This language means that the applicator must check for leaks inside the basement walls and clean them up before he leaves the premises. A failure to do this constitutes a label violation.

The word, should means that the action is suggested, but not required. For example, the statement “Product XYZ SHOULD only be applied by licensed technicians” means that the company really wants only licensed technicians to use this product, but other people can legally use it, in accordance with the label directions, of course.

The following examples are some termiticide labeling problems
that have surfaced recently.

• In 1997, the termiticide label changed from requiring trenching or rodding from the soil surface to the bottom of the basement footings when the footings are deeper than 48-inches below grade. Current termiticide labels require rodding from the soil surface to the basement footings or 48-inches deep whichever is less. The problem? In houses that have a deep basement, the termite control company isn’t required to trench or rod deeper than four feet below grade level. It is possible for termites to enter the structure underneath the chemical barrier. Even though this label change was made, we still recommend that a complete barrier treatment includes injecting termiticide all the way to the basement footings.

• Termiticide labels uniformly state that the termiticide MUST not be injected into saturated or frozen soil. The reason for this is that effectiveness is reduced when the soil is saturated because the soil will not accept the termiticide. Frozen soil prevents movement of the termiticide which may create an inadequate barrier. We have heard about exterior perimeter treatments being done when soil temperatures are well below freezing.

• Each termiticide label may be slightly different so it is important to read the label for the specific termiticide the pest control company is proposing to use. For example, the Termidor® label says that rodding holes MUST be 12-inches apart. Under some circumstances they can be closer than 12-inches, but the label clearly says that they MUST NOT BE MORE than 12-inches apart. With the other termiticide labels, it is up to the discretion of the termite control applicator how closely to space the injection holes; the label language either indicating that rodding should be spaced to give a continuous termiticide barrier or gives a range of spacing (i.e., 12-18-inches). However, when using Termidor, applicators must treat 12-inches apart because the label requires it. Varying from this could be considered a violation of the label directions.

• A complete barrier treatment for a house with a basement includes an exterior perimeter treatment—injecting and trenching the outside of the house—and an interior treatment. The interior treatment includes injecting through the basement slab inside the exterior walls and any places where cracks could allow termites access to structural wood (interior walls and basement steps). Some termiticide labels may not actually require outside and inside treatments be done. The label may say that the most effective treatment means the termiticide “should be applied in a manner to provide a continuous chemical barrier to prevent termites from attacking the wood to be protected. Unfortunately these words do not require a complete treatment which includes both an exterior and interior treatment. A wise consumer should not assume a complete treatment will be done. Be sure to ask if both interior and exterior treatments will be done. Get all these treatment details in writing before any treatment has begun.

If you think that a company failed to treat in a way that was required on the label, the company could be guilty of a label violation. For clarification, you may want to contact the Department of Agriculture, Plant Industry Division. In Nebraska, the head of the pesticide regulation division is Tim Creger. He can be reached at 402-471-2394.

For more information on how to estimate the cost of a termite treatment, refer to Termites Bite into Pocketbook, Fact Sheet 011-99. It is available at the Lancaster County Extension Office or on the internet at http://lanco.unl.edu/enviro