

# Making Decisions About Termite Barrier Treatments

## Lancaster County

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When termites are discovered inside the home, many people panic and think they need to make a fast decision. They have a vision of termites eating wood like a buzz saw. The reality is, each termite takes a tiny bite of the wood and removes it, so termite damage actually occurs very slowly.

In addition, termites aren't very active in Nebraska during the winter because they are cold blooded. So, if you find termites, don't panic and rush to make an ill-advised decision. Get all the facts about termites and termite treatments. Termite treatments are expensive — easily costing \$1,500 or more. You want to make the very best decisions you can.

Many people are not sure how to proceed when faced with a termite infestation. But, there are logical, rational steps that can be taken. These steps are as follows:

**1. If you see an insect you think is a termite, have it identified by an expert.** Your local county extension office should be able to identify termites for you.

**2. Have your house inspected.** It is important to know if there is a termite infestation inside your home. Subterranean termites (the kind we have in Nebraska) build mud tubes to connect their colony in the soil with wood that is above ground. If there is an active infestation, there will be live, cream-colored insects crawling inside the tubes. If there are no live insects present, the infestation may be old.

Inspectors may also look for signs



Dead termite swarmers in window sill.

of termite swarmers —small, black, winged insects that swarm in the spring. Even years after the swarm, wings may be found in cobwebs or in areas not cleaned very often. If evidence of swarmers is found inside, it is likely that worker termites are present, because swarmers emerge from mud tubes made by workers.

The best time of the year to have your home inspected is between May and October because termites are more active during warm months. In fact, termites often abandon above-ground feeding areas during the winter because, being cold-blooded, they cannot cross the frost barrier.

**3. If evidence of active termites are found, you should contact several pest control companies for bids.** Some companies may suggest using a bait treatment. If you are interested in bait treatments, check out *Understanding Termite Baits* at <http://lancaster.unl.edu/enviro/pest/factsheets/276-97.htm> The rest of this article will address barrier treatments.

To make an intelligent decision about barrier treatments, you will need

detailed bids from each company, so you can compare how companies will treat your home. Compare this with information on the termiticide label (the label on the product) to see how the manufacturer recommends treatment should be done.

Recent studies have shown that there *are* differences between termiticides used for barrier treatments.

In general, non-repellent termiticides (Premise<sup>®</sup>, Termidor<sup>®</sup>) are more effective than repellent chemicals. Studies conducted by the USDA-Forest Service show that Termidor<sup>®</sup> is more effective than Premise<sup>®</sup>. Because of the efficacy of Termidor<sup>®</sup>, this product can be applied at the labeled lower application rate (0.06%) with no compromise in effectiveness.

At this point, it is a good idea to estimate for yourself the cost of your termite treatment. This estimate should help you understand what a reasonable treatment for your home should cost. For this estimate, you will need dimensions of your home, the depth of your basement (grade level to basement footings), a copy of the insecticide label, and the cost of the chemical. From the directions on the label, you can estimate the volume of diluted liquid needed. For more help, refer to *Termites Bite Into Pocketbook* at <http://lancaster.unl.edu/enviro/pest/factsheets/011-99.htm>

For best protection of your house, we recommend a complete treatment, which we define as an outside perimeter application, at least four feet deep (if there is a basement), plus interior injections through the basement slab.

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**4. Go through bids carefully.** You should realize that bids will reflect the following costs to the pest control company:

1. Chemical cost
2. Labor (the men/women actually doing the job)
3. Equipment costs (drills, drill bits, tank, rodding equipment, truck, etc.)
4. Overhead (business rent, utilities)
5. Insurance (which protects the company in case of a problem application)
6. Profit

What if bids are low? Beware. These companies may be skimping on chemical or doing shoddy work by skimping on the labor necessary to do the job right. What if bids are much higher than your estimate? These companies may be paying their technicians more, have more overhead or be making more profit. High bids do not necessarily mean that you will be getting a better treatment.

In Nebraska, companies are now legally required to use a minimum concentration of termiticide on post-construction treatments. The law was changed in 2002 to protect consumers from companies that were diluting their chemical with so much water the treatment was ineffective.

In comparing bids, check to see if companies are proposing to do a complete treatment — exterior perimeter *and* interior — or whether the bids are based only on a perimeter treatment only. When you compare bids, make sure you are comparing the same types of treatments.

Done properly, an exterior perimeter treatment around a basement should cost roughly the same as the interior treatment. The exterior treatment will use more chemical and have more chemical cost, but the interior treatment will have more labor costs from drilling holes.

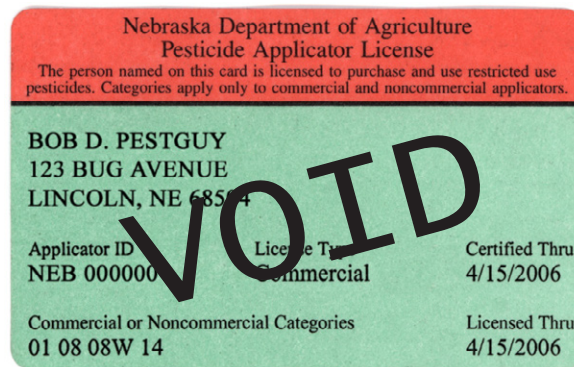
One termiticide, Termidor®, has received approval of a label for an exterior-only application. Several university termite researchers are conducting exterior-only treatments using non-repellent termiticides [fipronil (Termidor®), imidacloprid (Premise®)]. Only a few years of research has been conducted, so the long-term protection with exterior-only treatments is not known.

One researcher, Dr. Roger Gold, Texas A&M University, has reported exterior-only treatments using fipronil



**Application outdoors — filling trench**

(Termidor®) did not stop termite feeding when termites had entered the structure through the center of the house — presumably because the termites did not encounter the exterior chemical barrier. Because it is difficult to detect all points of termite entry, it is still best to do a complete barrier treatment, (exterior perimeter *and* interior) for the best protection of your home. You should expect to pay more for a complete barrier than a perimeter-only treatment.



**5. Schedule the treatment when you can be at home.** Persons in Nebraska doing termiticide applications for hire must be certified by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) which means they are trained and have passed an examination. All certified individuals have received a green and red certification card and must carry it when doing applications. *You should ask to see their certification card.*

There is an exception to this rule. A person can work under the “direction supervision” of a certified individual for 60 days before he/she needs to be certified. This is called the “60-Day Rule.” This special provision allows for an uncertified applicator to be in training while he/she is studying to take the certification test. Each person working under the 60-Day Rule must submit

an application form to NDA within 10 days of the first pesticide use which requires an applicator’s license. The name and certification number of the supervising pesticide applicator will be given on the application form.

*If the person does not have a certification card, this should indicate the person hasn’t had much experience doing termite treatments and you should be concerned.* Before any application begins, contact the Nebraska Department of Agriculture Pesticide

Program at 402-471-2394 to make sure the person has submitted the application form to legally apply pesticides under the 60-Day Rule.

If the 60-day application form has been submitted, you may want to express your concern to the pest control company about an untrained individual treating your house. If the Department of Agriculture has not received a 60-day application form from this individual, the individual may be in violation of Nebraska’s Pesticide Law and his/her direct supervisor, who is certified, must be present during the application.

#### **6. Watch the treatment and observe details.**

For example, is the company trenching around the outside of the structure — a label requirement? How deep is the technician rodding next to the basement? (The rodding must be at least four feet deep.) Also note the size of the insecticide tank, the number of times the tank is filled and how many gallons/packets of insecticide are added to the tank. Ask questions. If you are concerned about anything, take pictures or contact the NDA.

**Summary:** To fully understand the intricacies of termite treatments, spend time reading and gathering information before you make a decision. One resource that may be helpful is the *Termite Handbook for Homeowners*. This handbook is updated each spring to include new information about termite treatments. It can be found on the web: <http://pested.unl.edu/termite/>. It is also available at a low cost UNL Extension in Lancaster County, 444 Cherrycreek Rd., Suite A, Lincoln, NE 68504.