

## Factors to Consider When Selecting a Pest Control Company

### *A Guide for Consumers Considering Termite Treatment and Pest Control*



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Pesticide Regulation

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Bulletin 14

For the average family, buying a home is the single largest investment that they make. For most subterranean termites, what you call “home” is what they call “lunch.” This is true for the entire southeastern United States, an area defined as a high-risk area for subterranean termites.

#### Why Are Termites Infesting My House?

If you’re having a chronic problem with termite infestations, you’re probably wondering how it started in the first place. Termites require two things to survive: food and water. When they decide to move in, it’s because they have ambled along, bumped into your house, and discovered that it meets their needs. Subterranean termite foraging has been described as “random;” however, recent research has suggested that the branching tunnels of termites are actually fractals, which are the exact mathematical patterns that show up at different scales in tree branches, streams, and other similar natural phenomena. Whatever their pattern, subterranean termites manage to cover their territories pretty well over time. If there’s a food source, they’ll find it.

Most homes in South Carolina are “pre-treated” for termites. Because builders usually have a pre-treatment done before construction of the house begins, you may have not been able to choose the type of pre-treatment your house had or the person who performed the treatment. Presently, there are three types of pre-treatments that are available on the market: conventional liquid pre-treatments; borate pre-treatments; or termite baiting pre-treatments.

Pre-treating with conventional **liquid termiticides** establishes a chemical barrier in the soil around the structure’s foundation. Termites are almost always present in South Carolina soil, but a properly established chemical barrier can prevent them from gaining access to the structure. Depending on the chemistry, barriers can be a repellent, immediately lethal, or non-repellent and eventually lethal. All are effective when properly applied, although their persistence in a particular soil type and modes of action vary.

When **borate pesticides** are used during a pre-treatment, the application is made directly to the wood and not to the soil. This results in a residue of the borate on and in the wood. Research has shown that the termites will not tunnel over more than about 1 - 1 1/2 feet of borate-treated wood. The most effective time to make this application is during the construction of a building. It is very important that the lower few feet of all the lumber in the house is thoroughly treated with borate solution.

**Termite baits** work by exploiting the foraging, feeding, and food-sharing behavior of worker termites to spread small amounts of active ingredient throughout the colony. This results in a reduction in the number of foraging termites. As the population of the colony declines, so does the risk of its infesting nearby structures. This is accomplished by consistent and timely inspections of the structure and the termite bait stations for as long as your pest management professional has the property under contract. Therefore, termite baiting is best described as a “process” and not an “event.”

Unfortunately, as with most things in life, nothing is 100%, no matter how well a treatment is performed. If termites do invade your house, a “re-treatment” might be necessary. While a liquid treatment of the affected area is the most common response to a re-infestation, any of the technologies described are suitable for a re-treatment.

**My House Has Been Treated—So I Should Be Safe, Right?**

Most pretreatments are effective and, when backed up by warranties, can provide protection and peace of mind for several years. However, even if your house were treated under perfect conditions, there are still factors that can compromise the effectiveness of any treatment, even the most careful.

**Liquid termiticides** may not be well-suited for certain situations for many reasons. Since liquid termiticides exclude termites from a structure but do not reduce the size of the colonies in the soil, any disturbance or deterioration of the chemical barrier around the foundation can allow re-infestation to occur. In addition, if all above ground sources of moisture are not eliminated, it is possible for termites trapped in the structure to form secondary or "aerial" colonies, and they will continue to cause damage.

**Bait stations** must be located and fed upon by the termites before control begins, and during this time some additional damage may occur. They must also be inspected frequently (usually monthly or quarterly) to ensure that the bait or the monitoring device is still present and that the termites are actually visiting the bait stations. The inspection of these stations must continue for the entire time the structure is under contract. In addition to the monthly or quarterly monitoring of the bait stations, the structure should be inspected at least yearly to that any termites that get past the bait stations and into the structure itself will be detected before significant damage occurs.

The use of **borate products** does not provide for any product to be applied to the soil around a structure. It is thus especially important for all of the means by which termites could gain access to the structure to be corrected. Wood to ground contact should be broken, for example, and debris that may hold termites close to the foundation should be removed. It is also vital for a pest management professional to do a thorough structural inspection each year to make sure that the termites have not managed to gain access to the structure. While these products are labeled as "stand alone"—meaning they can be used without any other treatment—many pest control companies choose to make a limited application of another termite control method to supplement the borate treatments. In fact, such combined treatments are becoming more common as termite-control operators pick and choose the methods that their experience shows to be the best for a given situation.

**The Company Came Out and Retreated my House—Now the Termites are Back!**

Contact the company and express your concerns to the responsible party or the manager of the pest control company. In some cases, a representative of the termiticide manufacturer or distributor can assist the pest control company in diagnosing the problem. A good re-treatment can reestablish a chemical barrier against all possible entry points. If an infestation occurs, then the warranty spells out the responsibility of the pest control company. Unfortunately, no treatment is an absolute guarantee against a termite re-infestation.

**Termites Have Damaged my Home! Is the Pest Control Company Responsible for the Repairs?**


Check your contract. It will tell you whether or not the company will pay for damage caused by termites. The Department of Pesticide Regulation enforces laws regarding pesticide applications; we do not have jurisdiction over contractual matters. Contractual disputes are often resolved in small claims court, magistrate's court, or civil proceedings. If the treatment were not performed properly, the pest control company may be liable regardless of the terms of the contract.

**How do I Choose a Pest Control Company?**

Friends, neighbors, and coworkers are often excellent sources of referrals, or you might ask the company for references. The Department of Pesticide Regulation maintains an enforcement history database on our website located at <http://regfocus.clemson.edu/dpr/greenbook.htm>. However, please bear in mind that we cannot make a recommendation about any firm.

**How Can the Department of Pesticide Regulation Help Me?**

The Department of Pesticide Regulation ensures that pest control operators meet a minimum level of competence by requiring that they pass a comprehensive certification exam and demonstrate financial responsibility for property damage and public liability. Our field staff routinely conduct inspections to ensure that minimum standards have been completed. Our inspectors also respond to complaints regarding termite treatments or other aspects of pesticide use.

Please contact the Department of Pesticide Regulation at 864.646.2150 if you have questions about termites, pretreatments, or other pest-related topics. The Department also has field offices located throughout the state. A list of field offices and contact numbers is provided in the colored box. 

Anderson.....	843.494.2332
Aynor.....	843.957.1727
Beaufort.....	843.255.6060 Ext 111
Charleston.....	843.225.7065
Clemson.....	803.260.1462
Columbia.....	803.736.7680 Ext 112
Florence.....	843.667.1393
Newberry.....	803.403.7262
North Myrtle Beach.....	843.360.1512
York.....	803.628.0303