

# CONSUMER INFORMATION

## SUBTERRANEAN TERMITE CONTROL

Termite-control chemicals are formulated to kill and deter wood destroying insects. Federal and state laws require proper dilution and application by licensed and tested professional applicators. When the termite application is done properly according to label directions, a consumer should have little reason to be concerned about side effect health problems. As a consumer, you should know that use of any pesticide near places where you eat, work and sleep require added professional skills and specialized equipment. Therefore, to protect your family's health, it is prudent to hire a professional who can properly dilute and carefully apply termiticides with proper equipment according to label directions.

### CHEMICALS APPROVED FOR SUBTERRANEAN TERMITE CONTROL

At the end of 1987, there were 10 chemicals approved for subterranean termite control by EPA. Your licensed pest control operator in Texas is required to provide you a copy of the label prior to the job. You may want to examine the label to confirm its use for termites and check for EPA approval. Due to research progress, termite pesticides are being introduced and removed from the market regularly. To be current, telephone numbers are listed at the end of this sheet should you desire another opinion.

As a consumer, you have the right to know which termite-control chemical is to be used on your property. You should also know how these chemicals differ in toxicity, effectiveness, cost, and active life expectancy to control the subterranean termite. The shorter lived chemicals are generally more specialized and therefore more expensive and labor intensive.

### HEALTH FACTS

If anyone living in a dwelling requiring termite treatment has health problems, allergies, or special sensitivities to chemicals, the pest control professional should be advised in advance so special decisions and chemical recommendations can be made.

Some people may suffer from what has been called "chemophobia" (fear of chemicals) and any chemical odor may cause a psychological and even physiological reaction not related to chemical exposure. If this should be the case, you may select a chemical with little or no odor.

Your health risk from using termite-control chemicals depends on how often, how much, and how long you are exposed to the chemical. Exposure can occur through breathing the chemical, absorbing it through your skin or ingesting it. None of these exposures should be expected under proper dilution and application procedures.

Examples of immediate effects from overexposure to termite pesticides may include headache, blurred vision, dizziness, confusion, sweating, nausea or involuntary muscular movement. Most of these symptoms are similar to many other common health problems such as flu, stress, heat prostration, or drug abuse. The most common proof of acute pesticide exposure is a cholinesterase test or blood, urine, fatty tissue sample analysis in acute cases. Should an accident or problem occur, your doctor should check with the Poison Control Center or the Pesticide Hotline listed at the end of this sheet.

There has never been a single case of human cancer related to termite pesticide verified scientifically. Experiments in labs on mice has never been duplicated in rats or humans. Lab experiments use concentrated chemicals that would require ingestion of about 1.75 GALLONS of diluted 1 % chemical for humans to duplicate a lethal dose like mice receive by injection. For example, chlordane concentrate is diluted by law 100 times by ordinary water before injection into earth; therefore, possibilities of related health problems are very limited. Pest control operators who apply termite chemicals regularly have no statistical incidence of cancer any higher than the general public. Also, the U.S. Government requires from 5 to 10 years of testing and EPA approval before initial introduction of ANY pesticide on the market.

### BENEFITS VS. RISKS

There are trade-offs to be considered in your choice of chemicals. If you choose a shorter-lived chemical it may cost more and you may need to inspect and treat for termites more frequently. If you choose a less expensive, longer-lasting chemical it will remain termite effective for a longer period of time.

You may want to postpone chemical treatment of your property until any chemically sensitive people are not present. It is also important to know the name of any chemical used on your property, so that you can tell your doctor if necessary. The SPCB requires this information be provided to you before the application is made by a licensed professional pest control company.

### PROPER APPLICATION

Most subterranean termite-control chemicals must be placed under the soil surface, usually through holes drilled in the foundation by rodding, or through a trench dug around the foundation. In addition, alternative procedures may be allowed by the label. Injection holes drilled into concrete floors or walls should always be properly sealed. It is a violation of Texas pesticide laws to apply any pesticide except as its label directs.

A structure should not be re-treated for termites unless there are signs of an active termite infestation, or unless the ground where the chemical previously has been applied has been disturbed by construction work, plumbing repairs, etc.

When your property is treated for termites you may want to be present to oversee the work. However, caution is advised since high-pressure pumps and drills will be in operation to apply the chemical.

## DUCT WORK AND FOUNDATIONS

**Heating Ducts:** Prior to application, be sure to notify your pest control applicator if your dwelling has air conditioning, heating ducts or plenum located inside or near the slab or foundation. Special precautions must be taken to prevent penetration of the ductwork by the drills or accidental chemical injection into the ducts. In peer and beam houses, it may be advisable to have a qualified air-conditioning contractor inspect the joints and integrity of ducts prior to termite treatment.

**Cracked Foundations:** Known holes, cracks or spaces in your building's foundation should be filled with mortar or other appropriate material before the chemical is applied. Pest control operators are not qualified to determine structural problems. If you suspect hidden cracks in your foundation, you should consult a structural engineer or remove floor or wall coverings to assure better inspection prior to treatment.

**Concrete Blocks:** If your structure has a hollow masonry-block foundation, pesticides are sometimes required on the insides of blocks for termite entry tunnels. If the top blocks are not sealed as tightly as possible, pesticide fumes could escape into the crawl space or structure. The homeowner may want to have these openings sealed prior to application. All holes used to inject pesticides should be sealed as tightly as possible right after the application. Structural barriers may prevent sealing in some instances so initial inspection and acknowledgement is advised.

### ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE

-Find out about and maintain the chemical history of your house. You may want to contact previous owners. Has the house ever been treated for termites? Which chemicals were used? Was spot-treatment or full-house treatment done? Depending on the answers to these questions, you may not need further treatment.

-Since September 1, 1987, Texas law requires pest control companies to put a permanent tag on buildings they treat. This permanent tag, attached to a water heater, electric meter or under the kitchen sink, gives the company's name and address and tells when the building was treated. Listing what chemical or combination was applied is optional on the tag, but it is required by law in the pest control operator's permanent records according to the SPCB.

-Unless you want the security of prevention, you need not treat until you have seen active evidence of termite infestation. The presence of termite-damaged wood does not automatically mean that termites are still present. Periodic professional inspections may be appropriate.

-If you suspect your home is infested, don't panic. Termites usually damage wood slowly. Take the time to get a thorough inspection from a reliable company. Cost of the inspection generally relates directly to thoroughness and ability of the inspector. Incidence of termite infestation increases with age, but seven years of age in dwellings is most common according to Texas A & M research.

-A reliable termite-control firm will generally have an established business location and always be licensed by the Structural Pest Control Board, a Texas state agency. Ask for and check references as well as the "T" for termite designation on his license. You may also want to call the Better Business Bureau. Ask the firm for a report of specific work proposed, with a diagram of your property and an estimate of cost in writing.

-In addition to receiving this information sheet, you have a right to ask to see copies of the labels of any chemicals a pest-control company plans to use on your property. Pesticide labels may give you additional health and risk information. Always remember the label information is for the concentrated form and formulae will be diluted about 100 times with water before application (depending on chemical and concentrate).

-Any contract you sign should include the exact amount of money you will be charged and say what work will be done.

-You may also want to request that the pest control company send out a certified applicator to do the job. This may add to the cost of the job.

-It is not advisable to plant vegetable gardens within five feet of an area to be treated. Soil injection around water wells is not advisable according to some label instructions.

-If you rent, you may want to ask your landlord to notify you before any pesticide is applied.

-If you are a landlord, be aware that your tenants might be sensitive or allergic to chemicals and might appreciate being told of pesticide treatments ahead of time. Remember, EPA says "the label is the law" and should be reviewed before application and exact formulations and dilutions used.

-Protect your property by not keeping wood or wood products stacked against the house or in the crawl space under the house. Any wood that touches the ground and your house at the same time is a perfect entryway for termites.

-State law requires a three day cooling off period on any contract you sign. If you signed any contract and want to cancel within 3 days, you are within your legal rights.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

General information on subterranean termites is available from Texas A & M Extension Division, your local county agent, and the local library. Texas also has two other varieties of termites known as drywood termites that require tarping and fumigation of house, and Formosan termites which cause more damage than the other two species.

If you think you have been overexposed to termite-control pesticides or any other chemicals, call the Environmental Protection Agency's Pesticide Hotline: 1-800-858-7378. It is very important that you report the name of the chemical. Also give the number to your doctor along with the Texas Poison Center at 1-800-441-0040.

If your property has been treated for termites and you are concerned that chemicals were applied improperly, because an odor persists or because you can actually see the chemicals; report your concerns in writing to the: Structural Pest Control Board, P.O. Box 1927, Austin, Texas 78767-1927. (512) 305-8250