

When the Bugs Come

There is an army out there ready to attack you and your home! Thousands of fearless soldiers, constantly on patrol, are poised and ready to attack without provocation at the slightest hint of weakness. They are ruthless, moving in massive numbers in a silent, coordinated attack, and you will not even be aware that you are losing a battle until it may be too late. The most frightening thing is their enormous appetite. In fact, they would rather eat your house than conquer it. In my work on hundreds of homes in Sacramento, I have seen massive destruction caused by this voracious army. I have worked on homes where walls have been reduced to hollow cavities filled with a mush of wood debris, and literally supported by the stucco on the outside and plaster on the inside. I have seen hardwood floors reduced to crumbly remains and have even seen infested furniture.

Our office is currently involved in massive repairs of a three-story building in downtown Sacramento that had entire walls reduced to rubble from the ground floor all the way up to the roof. Just 12 years ago, this very same building had been completely repaired and the soil chemically poisoned with hundreds of gallons of termiticide. In the 12 years hence, the undefeated army returned to create even more massive destruction. What can you, the homeowner, do to prevent this type of catastrophe? Don't assume that just because your home is new that you're immune. Termites are everywhere in the Sacramento Valley and can become quickly established in your home. Here are some suggestions based on my experience:

1. Have your house inspected at least once every 2 years by a termite company. If you are on a really tight budget, you can educate and train yourself to conduct your own

inspections. You will be looking for the tell-tale signs that termites leave behind, such as their frass (excrement) and evidence such as mud tubes. By far, the greatest termite damage in our area is caused by subterranean termites who must maintain a connection with the soil for their moisture and protection. There are occasionally, however, infestations by dry wood termites who can fly through an attic vent and create a colony in your home without ever contacting the soil. There are other organisms, such as powder post beetles, who also do not require contact with the soil. These can be difficult to detect and require expensive whole house fumigation in order to eliminate.

2. Water getting into the structure of your house creates an environment in which termites thrive. Conditions which support dry rot are also likely to invite termites and can quickly escalate a minor infestation into major damage. The south side of your home is particularly prone to water entry. Even attic vents can be a source over time of enough moisture to support colonization by destructive insects.

3. Keep soil at least 6-8 inches from the wood of your home all the way around--no exceptions! This includes fences, planters and wood piles.

4. Don't assume that because termites have been found and treatment given that the problem is over. Termite colonies can go back thousands of years. In the case of the three-story building we are presently working on, it is estimated that there are over 3 million termites living in an area as large as a quarter block around. It may have been there for thousands of years waiting for more food to appear. Treating the ground around the

building does not kill the colony. Once an infestation of any size has been discovered, I recommend maintaining the structure on an annual termite contract.

We can never eliminate termites, but with vigilance you can at least keep them out of your home.

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