Before You Buy a Full Perimeter Termite Treatment

Understanding Your Options for Long-Term Subterranean Termite Control

When subterranean termites are discovered, homeowners are often presented with a full perimeter soil treatment as the most complete solution.

Full perimeter treatments can be effective and appropriate. But they are not the only effective treatment strategy, nor do they make a home permanently protected from termites.

Before deciding how your home should be treated, it is important to understand what a perimeter treatment does, what it does not do, and what alternatives are available.

1. A PERIMETER TREATMENT HAS A FINITE LIFE

Soil termiticides do not remain fully effective forever.

How long a treatment remains effective depends upon the active ingredient, application method, soil conditions, moisture, soil disturbance and other environmental factors.

The primary advantage of a full perimeter treatment is the creation of a broad zone of treated soil around the structure. But that raises an important long-term question:

If maintaining that treated perimeter is the reason for choosing a full perimeter treatment, what is the plan as the treatment ages?

Homeowners considering this approach should ask about the expected longevity of the particular product being used and when the protection should be reevaluated. Any subsequent treatment must be performed according to the product label and applicable regulations.

Without an ongoing plan, a full perimeter treatment eventually becomes a treatment that was performed sometime in the past.

2. AN EXTERIOR PERIMETER TREATMENT DOES NOT TREAT THE SOIL BENEATH THE ENTIRE HOME

Subterranean termites live and forage underground and can approach a structure from many directions.

An exterior perimeter treatment creates a treated zone along specified portions of the foundation. It does not create a chemical barrier beneath every square foot of a slab.

Termites may potentially reach interior portions of a structure through cracks in the slab, plumbing and utility penetrations, construction and expansion joints, and other openings or discontinuities beneath the structure.

Depending upon their underground route, termites reaching an interior area may not necessarily have crossed the treated soil along the exterior perimeter. This is why a perimeter treatment should never be considered a substitute for interior inspection.

3. FINISHED HOMES PRESENT A PRACTICAL LIMITATION

Creating comprehensive treated-soil coverage beneath an existing slab would require access to the soil beneath it.

In an occupied home, finished flooring such as tile, stone, wood or other materials can make widespread drilling and sub-slab treatment undesirable or impractical.

When termites appear at an interior wall or other interior location, localized treatment may therefore be the practical and appropriate response. A previous exterior perimeter treatment does not eliminate this possibility.

4. MODERN NON-REPELLENT TERMITICIDES CHANGED THE VALUE OF LOCALIZED TREATMENT

Modern non-repellent termiticides containing active ingredients such as fipronil work differently from older repellent soil treatments.

Termites can enter properly treated areas without being repelled. Exposed termites can continue moving and interacting with other termites, potentially extending the effects of treatment beyond the precise location where the termiticide was applied.

For this reason, an appropriately placed localized treatment should not be viewed simply as treating the few termites that happen to be visible at that location.

The objective is to treat the termite activity and pathways identified through inspection while taking advantage of the characteristics of the non-repellent termiticide. All applications must be made according to the product label.

5. MORE TERMITICIDE DOES NOT AUTOMATICALLY MEAN BETTER TERMITE MANAGEMENT

The amount of chemical applied should not, by itself, be used as a measure of the quality of termite protection.

A full perimeter treatment may require substantially more labor and material than a localized treatment, and there are situations where that additional treatment is justified.

There are also situations where inspection identifies localized activity that can appropriately be treated without treating the entire perimeter.

Likewise, price alone tells you very little.

A full perimeter treatment can be overpriced, fairly priced or underpriced. An unusually inexpensive treatment is not necessarily a bargain if the required preparation, application volume or treatment procedures are compromised.

The important question is not: "How much chemical am I getting?" It is: "Why is this treatment appropriate for my particular termite problem?"

6. NO TREATMENT ELIMINATES THE NEED FOR FUTURE INSPECTIONS

This may be the most important point of all.

Subterranean termite management should be viewed as an ongoing process, not simply a one-time chemical application.

Even after a properly performed perimeter treatment, termites can potentially appear at an untreated location in the future.

Regular inspection provides an opportunity to identify new activity before it develops into a more serious problem.

For that reason, we believe a termite-management program should include thorough inspection of both the exterior and interior of the structure.

Our Approach

Inspect thoroughly. Treat where necessary. Continue inspecting.

We perform regular interior and exterior inspections to look for evidence of subterranean termite activity.

When activity is identified, we evaluate the location, construction and likely entry routes and perform an appropriate localized treatment using a non-repellent termiticide when conditions and the product label permit.

Rather than attempting to create a chemical barrier around every possible termite pathway, our approach takes advantage of subterranean termite biology and natural foraging behavior. Termites continually travel through the soil in search of food. When that activity leads them through a properly treated area containing a non-repellent termiticide, they can become exposed without detecting or avoiding the treatment. Their continued movement and interaction with other termites can extend the effect beyond the immediate treatment area. In this way, the termites' own movement and social behavior become part of the treatment strategy.

This approach is supported by more than a dozen years of field experience. In our experience, regular inspection combined with appropriate localized treatment has provided effective long-term termite management, with reported subsequent damage generally limited to occasional minor wood or baseboard damage.

We do not claim that localized treatment guarantees termites will never appear somewhere else. It does not.

We also do not claim that full perimeter treatments are ineffective. They can be an appropriate choice in certain circumstances.

We simply believe homeowners deserve to understand the advantages and limitations of both approaches before making that decision.

Before approving a full perimeter treatment, ask:

- Where is the termite activity?
- Why does the entire perimeter need to be treated?
- What active ingredient and product will be used?
- How long can I reasonably expect the treated soil to remain effective?
- If maintaining perimeter protection is important, what is the long-term plan as that treatment ages?
- Does this treatment protect against termites entering through interior portions of the slab?
- Will my home still receive regular interior and exterior inspections?
- If termites appear at an interior location later, is that treatment included?

A reputable termite professional should be comfortable answering these questions.

The Bottom Line

A full perimeter treatment can be a valuable termite-control tool. But it should not be presented as permanent protection or as a substitute for future inspection.

Localized treatment with a modern non-repellent termiticide, combined with thorough recurring interior and exterior inspections, offers another approach to long-term subterranean termite management.

The goal is not to put the most chemical in the ground.

The goal is to identify termite activity, treat it effectively, monitor the entire structure, and detect future activity before significant damage occurs.