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## termites: chomping away at home owners

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MARKET NEWS

Hailed the silent destroyer, timber destroying subterranean termites also known as white-ants are any home owner's worst nightmare. They often go unnoticed for years without any immediate signs only to be discovered when the damage done is too severe. These termites, however, are not the only ones causing the damage. Various unregistered pest control officers and building contractors are causing major havoc with inadequate and incorrectly applied pre-treatment against these pests.

The South African Pest Control Association (SAPCA) regularly receive complaints from home owners who move into their homes only to find that the grounds on which the house is built or the structure have not been treated properly. Often this is the result of building contractors appointing unregistered pest control officers who act illegally in either using banned chemicals or applying chemicals incorrectly.

Termiticides are registered through the Registrar Act 36 of 1947, only after thorough testing by the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS). The testing is done in accordance with the SABS code of practice 0124. Modern termiticides, which are more 'environmentally friendly', only offer a protection and efficiency guarantee to a maximum of 5-years compared to older compounds like DDT and Chlordane, which have been banned. This however is not always the case, according to Mark Enslin, President of the South African Pest Control Association.

SAPCA have found that there are PCOs that offer to termite- proof buildings at a rate per square metre, which was well below the wholesale cost of the chemicals alone and still offering a 10-year guarantee. "There is no way that this can be possible," says Enslin. He continues by saying that any pest control company charging such a ridiculous price with a 10-year guarantee on top of it is either using banned substances like Chlordane, or is not using the termiticides at the prescribed dosages, in accordance with the label and as prescribed by SABS 0124. "Since Chlordane has been banned pest control companies are no longer able to offer a 10-year guarantee on termite proofing. There is currently no chemical on the market that can offer the kind of protection that Chlordane did," says Enslin.

Chlordane was banned due to its hazardous effect on humans and the environment. The chemical contaminates the air of homes by diffusion through concrete flooring, ceiling drywall or outgassing from previously treated indoor areas. Documented health problems can include child cancers, leukemia, chronic infections, bronchitis, asthma, infertility, neurological disorders and aggression.

Enslin feels that the government, architects and building contractors have a part to play in this kind of misconduct as they are demanding a 10-year guarantee. Developers are also pushing for pest controllers to undercut, thus encouraging pest control operators to use termiticide at below prescribed dosages. "I understand that one cannot expect the building contractor to play the watchdog, however they should arm themselves with information regarding the termite treatment. They should realise that since the cost of the registered products excluding labour and transport associated with the treatment are running between three to eight rand linear or square metre, it would therefore be unrealistic then to expect to pay less than R10.00 per Lm /sqm for pre - construction termite proofing. By turning a blind eye the contractor or developer is unwittingly 'stealing' from or defrauding the homeowner," says Enslin. Enslin continues to say that quotes below this price should be scrutinised because a person needs to relate the price paid for termite proofing to the value of the structure that you are wishing to protect.

The danger of inadequately applying termiticides is well illustrated in the example of a luxury lodge that was built on the banks of the Chobe by a South African construction company, who did their own "termite treatment", using watering cans and chlorpyrifos purchased locally (Botswana). Termites entered the property a year later, causing more than R 2 million in damages. The contractor was forced to repair the damage, and ultimately lost money on the construction job.

Imagine what would have happened if the building contractors had defaulted and the owners were left with a structure with that kind of damage. In this instance the damage occurred in the first year, but it could occur at any time.

SAPCA motivates consumers and the industry to only make use of registered pest control operators. SAPCA members, for example, all adhere to a strict code of conduct prohibiting them to fall into the trap of undercutting, using unregistered chemicals and misappropriating chemicals. "Consumers can rest

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assured that our members are also all registered with the Department of Agriculture. In addition to this, if the customers have a complaint about a SAPCA member they have better recourse," says Enslin. Property owners should also insist on proof that the termite proofing was done in accordance with National Building Regulation.

When selecting a pest control officer to termite-proof your development or to treat a current infestation ensure that he/she complies with the following:

- employed with a licensed pest control company
- in possession of advanced knowledge of construction and home building
- expert knowledge of termite identification and biology
- understanding of the local and state ordinances regarding pest control
- knowledge of the various treatment methods and resources to customize a treatment plan suitable for your development
- awareness of EPA-approved materials and environmental standards
- ability to provide detailed written notes of the preliminary inspection
- confidence in a guarantee of service from a stable company with a reputation for providing effective termite prevention, treatment and control.
- Lastly, be suspicious of 'cheap pricing' and extended guarantees that exceed 5 years

Termite treatment is dependent on the type of termite that is found at the site and this classification can only be done by a trained technician. The type of termite further varies according to the geographical location of the premises. There are two main categories of termites, namely the Subterranean and Dry Wood Termite, which can be found throughout South Africa. Harvester termites are the most common species found in the Western Cape.

Although termites form an important part of our local ecosystem by breaking down dead cellulose material, this can become a serious liability in residential areas, where timber is used in buildings and homes. When termites attack they weaken the timber, which can lead to the collapse of the building.

Ridding a building of termites requires special skills. There are a few essential tips that home owners can use to lessen the risk of termite infestations. These include eliminating moisture problems, by repairing leaky faucets and water pipes, and removing potential food sources such as firewood and wood stumps around the perimeter of the house.

For more information visit [www.sapca.org.za](http://www.sapca.org.za) and get in touch with The South African Pest Control Association on 0861 114 556.

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