

What you need to know about

# Termite management

## What is termite management?

Termite management involves reducing the chances that major damage is caused to your house by termite infestations. Termites cause more damage to Australian houses than fire, floods and storms combined – damage that is not covered by household insurance.

The Building Regulations require all new buildings, including alterations and extensions, built within designated termite-infested areas, to have some form of management against termite attack. The Building Code of Australia provides two alternative strategies for termite management: the use of termite resistant materials for the primary structural elements, or the installation of a chemical or physical barrier system

## Who declares an area termite infested?

Councils may declare areas within their municipality that are likely to be subject to infestation by termites. Buildings, including alterations and extensions, constructed within a declared area must have some form of pre-construction termite management. You should check the Building Commission website [www.buildingcommission.com.au](http://www.buildingcommission.com.au) or consult your local council to determine whether the area in which you are planning to build, has been declared subject to termite infestation.

## What do termites do?

When forming a new colony, termite alates (the sexually reproductive stage of the termite lifecycle) are known to fly around in great numbers, particularly in the changing warmer months. This occurs annually. Once favourable conditions are found to begin a new colony their wings drop off and they mate, rarely coming out into the open. At this next stage of their lifecycle body colour becomes paler and there is a need to avoid light and maintain an optimum temperature and humidity for working and living. They sometimes also conceal themselves within mud-like tubes or galleries. Concealed locations within your home carry a greater potential for undetected structural damage.

Often termites are found to destroy timber internally, leaving only a wafer-thin layer to protect themselves from the outside environment. There is no predictable pattern or height restriction to their infestation sites and their tubes or galleries have been known to travel up walls with termite infestations found in roofs and even high-rise construction.

## How can termites be managed?

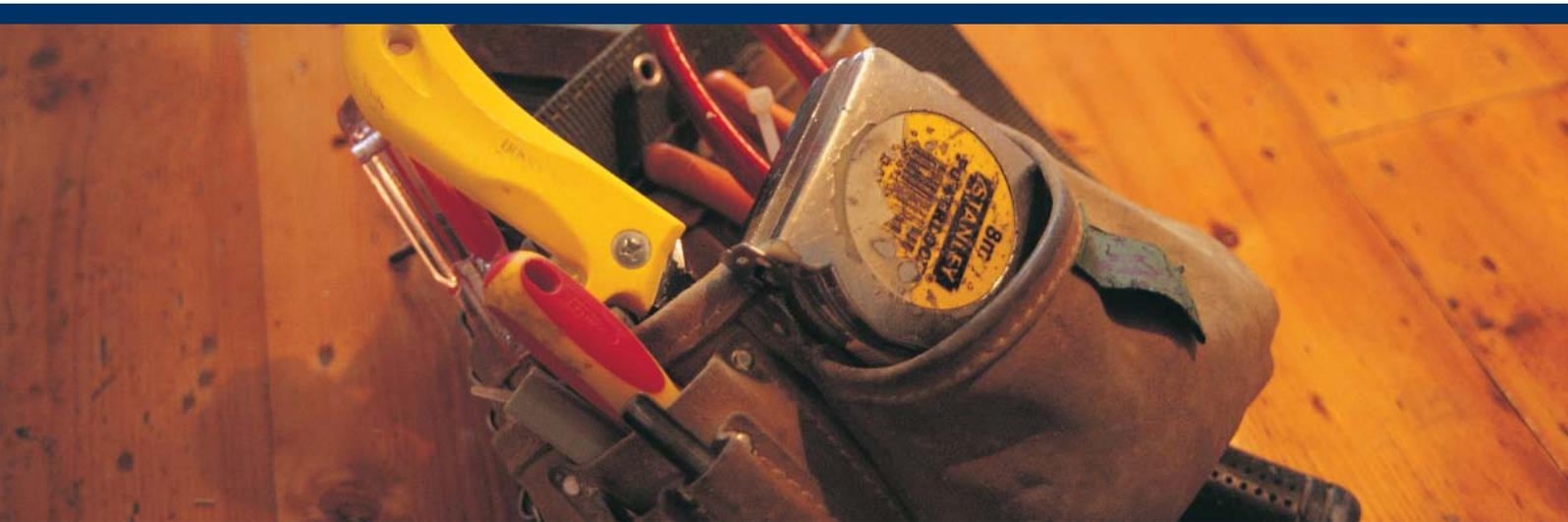
### At design stage

If you are building a new home or major extension, you can choose to use termite resistant primary structures like concrete slabs, termite resistant timber and steel frames. By doing this you limit the potential for termite damage to secondary and superficial elements which are easier to detect and cheaper to replace. This option may reduce future ongoing costs and uses conventional and familiar materials and construction methods and does not rely on a regular maintenance system or professional liability policy.

Alternatively you can specify a physical or chemical barrier to be installed during construction. This should be in accordance with Australian Standard AS3660.1 and should be finalised during the design stage. Some barriers will require ongoing inspections, maintenance and/or chemical replenishment.

### During building construction

The risk of attack can be reduced if effort is made to remove tree stumps, roots, off-cuts and to properly consolidate the soil to minimise cracks in concrete slabs. Concrete is a very effective termite barrier if it is correctly designed and constructed on properly prepared ground. Termites eat any cellulose material which besides wood, even includes electrical cabling, some plastics and other composite building materials. This does not include concrete, but if it cracks, they may widen the crack and find their way into any cavity such as walls and beneath floors. Termites only require a 1.5mm gap to gain access.



### When buying a house

It is strongly recommended that before you buy a house, you have an expert inspect it for termite activity. The cost of a full report is minimal compared with the potential expense of repairs. Ensure you engage a properly qualified, experienced and insured pest inspector and ask them to report on the type, age and condition of any termite barrier system which may be installed, and on the materials used for critical structural elements.

### Long-term protection

Protection in the long-term can be gained by the application of chemical or physical barriers (or both) to prevent termites from penetrating the structure. An Australian Standard (AS3660.1) has been written on the subject. The aim is to keep any cellulose material, especially timber away from soil contact and to encourage termites to build a mud tube out in the open where it can be seen during a regular, careful inspection.

Termite barriers are designed to stop concealed access and force termites into the open where their mud tunnels can be more easily detected. Physical barriers range from small graded stone particles to fine termite-resistant, stainless steel mesh and chemically impregnated composite products.

Termite resistant materials are designed to protect the critical concealed structural elements of your home, while ensuring a 'small target' for any termite activity and do not become less effective over time. Ensure you use a product that has been certified and complies with the relevant Australian Standard.

You must be proactive in your decision-making process. And most importantly, you must arrange for appropriately qualified operators to carry out regular inspections. You should also be fully informed about ongoing maintenance requirements and the best pre or post construction options.

### How do I identify termite activity?

Termite activity is often difficult to detect as it usually occurs in concealed areas. It is recommended to conduct regular visual inspections in and around your home to identify any potential termite activity. If you suspect any termite activity you should engage an expert to conduct a full inspection.



Image 1



Image 2

### What to look for:

- Weak timber that breaks easily revealing wafer thin layers (see image 1). Skirting boards are often the first point of damage.
- Look for changes in corner facias under gutters as termites are attracted to damp or moist areas.
- Mud-like tubes or material around external footings/brickwork, or internal fittings like service pipes and electrical plugs (see image 2).
- Cracks/holes in timber or plaster with a fine dust residue.
- Check surrounding trees, wood piles and garden beds (up to a 50 metres radius around the home) to identify if a colony is active nearby.

### What should I do if I find termites?

Should you uncover termites, try to put things back as they were. Surface spraying and ripping out floorboards, architraves or other building material may kill a few termites in those timbers but in doing so you have lessened the chances of an expert effectively treating the main nest. The termites will re-group and probably choose to attack another section of the house structure.

Depending on preferences and construction, an approved pest controller can assist with the best type of treatment, which, besides chemical spray options, may include reticulation and/or baiting systems.

Termites regularly re-infest with multiple nests attached to the colony at a radius of 50 plus metres. This, together with the fact that a termite colony can consist of over two and a half million individuals, means that if you do discover an infestation, it is prudent and civically responsible to immediately notify your neighbours and local council.

## Tips

### Avoiding damage by termites

- Choose a termite management system to suit your preferences and the needs for the type of construction.
- Investigate the total cost of termite management systems over the lifetime of your home.
- Understand the system of termite management and maintenance requirements for your house.
- Have a pest controller inspect the house every 12 months, especially if you are in a high hazard area. An expert inspection should also be done before purchasing a property with a termite free statutory declaration provided by the vendor.
- If you are concerned about existing or potential infestation, you should contact your local pest management company.

### Maintenance/housekeeping

- Check your property and building regularly for termite activity to reduce the risk of damage.
- Plumbing leaks, drainage problems and roof leaks should be addressed promptly, as termites are attracted to damp conditions.
- Garden beds and mulching should not be built up against walls, as this allows termites an undetectable entry point to the building.
- Do not block or cover sub-floor ventilation with garden beds, mulching or paving.
- Do not stack materials against walls, as this can allow termites to enter without early detection.
- Sub-floor areas should be well ventilated. Ensure vents are not obstructed.
- Storage of cellulose products in the sub floor space should be avoided.
- Use termite resistant timber for works around the property, including retaining walls.
- Use metal stirrups for verandah and gateposts.
- Clean and check timber decks regularly.

## Useful Contacts

### CSIRO enquiries

Bag 10  
Clayton South VIC 3169  
Telephone: 1300 363 400  
Fax: 95452175  
Email: [enquiries@csiro.au](mailto:enquiries@csiro.au)  
[www.csiro.au](http://www.csiro.au)

### Australian Environmental Pest Managers Association

Suite 4, 532-542 Hampton Street  
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### Termite Action Victoria Inc

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## Need more information?

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