

A COMPREHENSIVE ONTARIO TERMITE
CONTROL PROGRAM

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SUMMARY

Subterranean termites have been identified in Ontario since the late 1920's. Since this time of possible introduction, the human element has inadvertently assisted their spread by way of transporting infested material and soil to new sites. Until 1975, this spread was virtually left unchecked at which time a termite control program was introduced. The program created a greater awareness both from a municipal and homeowner perspective. However, it did not have the capability of handling the increased participation of the municipalities wanting financial assistance.

A new program has now been introduced which supports a strong technical component and a comprehensive integrated termite control strategy that requires the full co-operation of concerned levels of government, the homeowner and the pest control industry.

In addition to the technical and educational components, the Ministry of the Environment offers to participating municipalities a grant component that must in turn, be, administratively supported by the municipality. This program, by promoting incentive grants, assists owner-occupants of residential properties with a proportion of the costs involved in treating their properties to control termites.

It is the Ministry's objective to provide interested municipalities with printed guidelines on which they may base a termite control program strategy.

INTRODUCTION

The subterranean termite, Reticulitermes flavipes, in Ontario was first detected at Point Pelee in 1929. Sightings in other small towns such as Oxley, Amherstburg and Windsor followed. The City of Toronto had its first sighting in 1938 in the harbour area. Since this time the termite population has spread to cover several large areas of the city. The neighbouring metropolitan area has also become infested, with East York, Scarborough and the City proper having the greatest problems. Since 1973, infestations have been found in Kincardine, Hamilton, Guelph, Fergus, Elora, Dresden, Elmira, Brampton, Thornhill, Oakville, Mississauga, Leamington and various towns in Essex County.

The destructiveness of the termite has caused financial strain to many homeowners from wood damage and subsequent replacement costs, yet more specifically from treatment and preventative cost factors. Termite damage may also cause financial concern to municipalities who lose assessment income on properties that are heavily infested. It was with these considerations in mind that a comprehensive termite control program was introduced.

A major purpose of the provincial subsidiary program is to create public awareness of the termite problem. If the residential homeowner can rely on financial assistance in this matter, it stands to reason that he will be more inclined to report an infestation and to begin treatment to control the pest.

It is now known that the termite is established in 27 Ontario municipalities. New infestation sightings are reported from both new and previously known infested areas. The Termite Control Program has achieved an awareness factor that has assisted communities and building departments to detect termite activity. As a result, the further spread of termite infestations in the province will be detected sufficiently early that municipalities will not suffer severe economic losses.

Until recently, the majority of the treatments to residential properties were being performed only when infestation had been identified. The present program emphasizes both the pre-treatment of properties being built and the treatment of properties surrounding the infested structure. It was discovered that single dwelling treatments were only driving the colony to other wood sources within a few years. This single treatment procedure could be a major reason for the termite problem reaching the stage that it has. Consequently, entire sector treatments are now being emphasized to place additional stress on the colonies and hopefully to gain control of the termite infestation in a given area. Sector

treatment involves the removal of all wood-to-soil contact on the infested property(s), on adjoining property(s) and buffer area properties, and the full chemical treatment of the infested and adjoining property(s). All areas are subsequently monitored.

Chlordane and other similar chemicals discovered in the late 1940's were found to be effectively persistent in the soil and to eliminate termites in laboratory conditions. Field studies of homes treated during the 1960's still show residual activity in the Toronto area. The chemicals used at present act by forming a barrier around a residence. Termites trapped inside the barrier die due to a lack of soil contact. The total removal of all wood-soil contact in the infested area and in the buffer area creates a stress for the termite colony. The presence of the chemical barrier and the occurrence of a severe winter season also add to this stress factor. Under the Pesticides Act, 1973 and Regulations, professional extermination businesses and exterminators are licensed to ensure safe and knowledgeable management of pest control, including termite control.

THE PROGRAM

Since the Hazardous Contaminants and Standards Branch of the Ministry of the Environment controls the use, distribution and vendors of pesticides, and the licensing of pest control companies, the Termite Control Program has been placed under its jurisdiction.

Under the Municipal Act, Paragraph 210, municipalities are required to control termites, and allowed to provide grants and loans. If termites are found to exist, the municipality may pass a by-law to enforce these provisions.

Appendix I shows an example of a typical Termite Control By-Law. Twenty-two municipalities in southern Ontario now have such a by-law. In these municipalities, termite control duties fall under the aegis of their building departments, and their by-laws cover termite control in both commercial and residential properties.

When a municipality has undertaken to enforce a termite control by-law they may wish to come into an agreement with the Province of Ontario (Appendix II). The Crown's agreement with the municipality requires consultation and the exchange of information; however, the municipality administers the program with the assistance of Provincial funding.

Municipalities following termite control guidelines have shown a strong commitment to apply a planned strategy approach. The new program allows for improved utilization of resources and for local autonomy.

The Municipality operating a termite control program does so through its Building or Property Standards department. Municipal inspectors promote the program in the priority areas by public education and awareness and, if necessary, under by-law enforcement.

The Ministry of the Environment provides municipalities with technical expertise, training programs, education material in the form of guidelines, booklets, and other material for public dispersal. The Ministry also assists municipalities in evaluating their termite problem, by means of visual surveys and by establishing a program strategy.

In operating the program since 1975, the Ministry of the Environment has found that the removal of all wood (other than living trees, shrubs, etc.) in direct contact with the soil prior to proper chemical treatment leads to a very low reinfestation rate. Reinfestation after treatment, is usually due to improper dispersal of chemical or to missed wood-soil contact areas. The grant portion of the program assists homeowners with the cost of wood-soil removal and the replacement of certain structures with non-cellulose material. Chemical treatment requires the placement of chemical into the soil around and beneath all structures, into all foundation-wall voids at and below grade level, and the treatment of soil around trees, utility poles, sheds, fence posts, etc.

The program also promotes the proper storage of fire wood, adequate ventilation in damp areas and the correction of moisture problems. A completely integrated management control program is put forth in an attempt to stress the colony to the point of minimal activity. By removing conducive situations, like moisture conditions, wood as food sources, and treating soil to reduce movement to housing and ancillary structures, this is being achieved.

The Ministry has also promoted pre-treatment of buildings during construction, in co-operation with building permit authorization by municipalities, to reduce further termite infestation in known active areas.

The municipality must also consider long term planning in addition to short term goals. Available funding, pest control industry capabilities, municipal workload, season and weather conditions, ethnic and cultural climate, pesticide fears, etc. must all be addressed in considering a strategy.

The municipal termite control by-law can assist the inspector with some enforcement problems; however, most municipalities attempt to establish an educated public to enhance the program objectives.

The present program elicits a good degree of public awareness. With public co-operation further active infestations can be located and destroyed before they have a chance to spread. With the grant program, the public are more inclined to have their homes treated for future protection, and future financial savings. The municipalities involved also profit if infestations are caught early. Municipal assessment values are not lowered, and there is a saving in grant subsidies if the termite infestation is not allowed to spread.

The Ministry of the Environment maintains a record of all treated properties, in addition to informing municipalities of all new infestations located during the summer survey. Since most municipalities in southern Ontario rely on homeowners to report termite infestations, educational programs were introduced. Termite literature and the educational material are available in the languages of the large ethnic communities. Seminars and training programs are also made available to municipal inspectors.

CONCLUSION

Any control program established on a large scale requires the co-operation of all concerned. Public apathy and lack of by-law enforcement will only result in the spread of termites. This situation has occurred and is evident in some areas of our province. However, in areas where public awareness is promoted and by-laws are fully enforced, the termite control program has kept the infestation to a controllable level.