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## [Focus On Termite Control] Well-Oiled Machine

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 6/11/2003 4:03:50 PM


There are a number of termite bait products available for use by the structural pest management industry. There is also a great deal of research taking place across the country concerning such things as subterranean termite biology, foraging behavior, colony size and colony distribution.

A tremendous amount of knowledge has been gained about subterranean termites from research efforts, as well as a realization that there is still a vast amount of information that is not known or fully understood about subterranean termites. It is also likely that the pest management industry will continue to see enhancements to termite baiting products that are currently available, totally new termite bait products, feeding enhancement products and even new technologies that many of us have not even considered.

My personal field experience in the use of subterranean termite baits has been largely obtained through using the Sentricon® Termite Colony Elimination System manufactured by Dow AgroSciences. I believe that the other termite bait products that are available can and will work effectively in controlling subterranean termite infestations. Regardless of the subterranean termite bait product(s) that you are using, there are areas of "common ground" that we should consider when using any of these products.

In this article we're going take a look at some practical thoughts and practices that should take place in order to eliminate termite infestations from within structures when using termite baits.

DOWN-TO-EARTH POINT OF VIEW. I personally look at termite baits as another tool in my "tool bag" of control options that are available in eliminating or preventing a termite infestation at the property of my customers.

Our pest control firm has a number of structures under subterranean termite warranties that are "standalone" termite "baiting sites." We also have a number of sites where we have initially provided a liquid termiticide at points of detected termite infestation or areas that are some of the most vulnerable potential entry routes for subterranean termite infestation. We have often provided these "supplemental" liquid termiticide treatments to maximize our chances of rapidly eliminating known termite infestations and essentially establishing two lines of defense.

To me it really doesn't matter whether we use the term "termite control," "termite management" or "termite colony elimination." The bottom line is that when I have a customer who is paying my company for protection against subterranean termites, my objective is to eliminate termite activity

at that property as safely and effectively as possible. I want to protect the property of that customer and prevent future termite activity that can result in swarming, feeding on that property, damage to the structure or damage to the contents within that structure. I also want to minimize the potential for any litigation, establish a profitable account and have a satisfied customer.

I honestly feel that the use of termite baits can be used effectively to help achieve these goals when addressing subterranean termite infestations.

A PEST CONTROL COMPARISON. For those of us who have dealt with rodent control programs, I think you can easily relate to several concepts that also apply to effectively using termite baits for subterranean termite control.

One of the first comparisons that comes to mind is storage and transportation of rodent bait. It makes sense that rats often won't feed readily on rodenticide that has been sitting on a shelf in a stock room or the toolbox of a service vehicle along side of a bunch of liquid insecticides. Rodent baits will absorb odors and these contaminants can contribute to the avoidance of feeding. Termite baits and monitoring devices "contaminated" with insecticide or other odors are also less likely to be attractive to termite feeding.

Rats and mice have varying "home ranges" where they normally travel and feed. Placement of rodent control devices will vary depending on the targeted rodent species, the site and other conditions that are present. The same holds true for termite baiting. We need to have sufficient numbers of stations and/or bait placements made where termite activity is or may be present. We should make placement decisions for termite baiting devices based upon the results of inspections and the conditions that are present at that particular site. Simply placing one termite station and/or bait placement every "X" feet may not work in every situation that you encounter.

Have you ever started an account for rat control and made a follow-up visit only to find that the rats were still alive and well? They hadn't fed on your bait and it didn't even look like they had entered a single rodent station. If this has ever happened to you I hope that you didn't just add more of the same bait to the same stations and come back in another week or two to find the same thing again.

If you have a site where termites are present and you are not getting feeding on your monitors or bait placements do something different. If you check exterior rodent stations and find them standing in water with decaying bait inside do you simply replace the bait and go to the next station? Hopefully you'll consider relocating that station to a more suitable site nearby. Subterranean termites do require moisture for survival, however; stations that are constantly soaked and contain decaying monitors or bait are not a highly desirable food source.

TECHNIQUES TO CONSIDER. Over the years I have been fortunate to have observed technicians maintaining termite bait sites throughout the Mid-Atlantic and the Southeast regions of the United States. During that time I have seen the use of a number of innovative termite baiting techniques and tools that companies and their technicians have developed to aid them in successfully maintaining subterranean termite baiting programs.

About seven or eight years ago Jack Roberts of A-1 Termite & Pest Control in Lenoir, N.C., had a foot auger made to his specifications for use in placement of auxiliary termite monitoring stations adjacent to active bait placements. This was used to minimize disturbance to the termites in the existing active station immediately adjacent to the new placement. The foot auger could also be used on new site installations in place of a gas-powered auger when moist soil conditions were present.

In Florida a company branch manager purchased a small hand-powered drill vs. a power or hammer drill for drilling small holes into infested wood to increase the likelihood of termites entering an above-ground bait placement. This tool was used to minimize the disturbance of the termites in the area of infestation. This technique could also apply with the injection of termite gel baits that are now currently available.

Once I observed three or four rolls of paper towels in the passenger seat of a termite technician's service truck in Charleston, S.C. Of course I had to ask the technician why he had all of those paper towels in his truck. He replied by saying that due to the sandy soil in the area he would wrap a sheet of paper towel around his monitoring station immediately prior to inserting it into the ground. This would keep the sand from filtering into the station and the paper towel might even have some attractiveness to termites. He also proceeded to show me a large flower watering pot that he used to wet the sandy soil with prior to auguring the holes for the monitoring stations. He watered the soil so that the sand would stick together long enough for insertion of the stations.

In the Piedmont region of North Carolina we can have problems with termite monitors filling with water due to our poorly draining clay soil. I personally like to auger into the ground an extra station length and drop in wooden monitors beneath the stations. The idea behind this is to create adequate drainage and to establish direct earth/wood contact beneath the current station site. In some situations I feel that this can increase termite feeding on monitoring devices as well as lessen the likelihood of station abandonment by foragers when disturbed.

**CONCLUSION.** Keep in mind that if you are using termite baits for subterranean termite control you must use a lot of common sense and it can't hurt to be a little innovative. Study the literature provided by the manufacturers of these products, read current publications like PCT Magazine or PCT Online and learn from others in our industry.

Be open-minded with new termite baiting products as they come to market and stay as current as possible on new research findings. If you're not already, you should seriously consider the use of termite baits as a part of your "termite control tool bag" for success in eliminating subterranean termite infestations.

*Manufacturers, if you have new information regarding your company's termite bait products, please send a photo and press release to [jdorsch@pctonline.com](mailto:jdorsch@pctonline.com).*

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