

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ANNUAL MAINTENANCE AND CUSTOMER-FAVORABLE SERVICE AGREEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR TERMITE INFESTATION PREVENTION, ORLANDO ENTOMOLOGIST PHILIP “DOC” NICHOLS SAYS

ORLANDO (February 26, 2006) – Unless your home is completely built of concrete, it is susceptible to termite damage – especially in Florida.

According to the National Pest Management Association, termites devour homes to the annual cost of \$2.5 billion in treatments and damages in the United States, including \$500 million in Florida. Since termite damage is not covered by homeowners insurance, securing and maintaining a service agreement with a pest control company is important.

Mid-February marks the beginning of subterranean termite swarm season, a period when winged swarms, new kings and queens emerge from existing and thriving termite colonies and fly off to establish new ones. The season continues through April, but regardless of whether these termites are visibly swarming, homeowners should get annual inspections, Philip “Doc” Nichols urges. If you are buying an existing home, be aware of the telltale signs of termite infestation, adds Nichols, who is an entomologist for Orlando-based Middleton Lawn & Pest Control.

“Unfortunately, many people wait until they see swarms of termites before calling a pest control company. By that time, colonies are already established and the damage may already be extensive,” Nichols explains. “You can minimize the chance of termite infestation by getting subterranean termite treatment and maintaining your service agreement with a licensed and reputable pest control company.

“Make sure your service contract gives you a repair guarantee,” Nichols added. “Also be sure that there is not a long list of exclusions that do more to protect the company than the customer.”

Licensed and reputable, Nichols says, are the key words. Charles Bronson, who is commissioner of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, issued a consumer alert February 9 urging that all homes in Florida have subterranean termite protection and imploring homeowners to exercise caution when selecting a pest control company.

Before entering into a service agreement, consumers should understand the details that are outlined in the contract, which often includes an assortment of exclusions, Nichols says.

“If your home is damaged by termites, and it is a result of something that is not covered in the service agreement, then you will pay for it out of your pocket,” Nichols said. “Many pest control companies have agreements that are filled with exclusions. For

example, some agreements state that the pest control company is not responsible for termite damage from a crack in the slab.”

“The space created by plumbing fixtures protruding through is considered a crack in the slab,” he added. “And termites can enter a home through those cracks.”

Middleton’s subterranean termite service agreements have virtually no exclusions, Nichols points out, and cover any subterranean termite damage. There is no other service agreement in the industry like Middleton’s, he says.

“It is our goal to establish long-term relationships with our customers, and one way to accomplish this is through providing trustworthy and customer-friendly service agreements that are consumer favorable,” Nichols said.

For prospective homeowners on the market for an existing home, understanding the signs of termite infestation is important, Nichols says. It is important that homebuyers have their own pest control company inspect the structure before closing, rather than solely rely on the inspection report provided as part of the closing.

Most termites spend their entire lives hidden - crawling through tunnels, burrowing underground or working inside wood. But every spring, mature subterranean termites produce swarmers which emerge from their colonies and fly away to establish new colonies. In many cases, these "swarmers" are the first clue that a termite colony is thriving inside the house. Other indications of termite infestation include mud tunnels and the darkening, splintering or blistering of wooden structures, Nichols says. Damaged wood becomes thin and is easily punctured by a knife or a screwdriver. Even concrete block homes are not immune.

“These homes have roof trusses, internal walls and doors made of wood, drywall backing and with concrete, you can have cracks in the slab, and there are hollow voids in block walls,” Nichols said. “ Unless you build it entirely of concrete, no home is immune to termites. Even the home’s contents made of wood or cellulose products are susceptible to damage. The action you take as a homeowner will determine whether they become a problem or not.”

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