



The
Steel
Framing
Company

your home
1300 63 2266

ABN 37 124 102 370

Termite Damage in Perspective

There are more than 350 species of termites in Australia.

Less than 10 species cause 99% of the \$damage by eating the seasoned timber found in houses. Most prefer leaf litter and dead grass, others prefer the damp, rotting wood inside trees and logs.

Some mound-building termites will attack houses, however the ominous presence of a mound is sufficient reason for any homeowner to physically destroy it — and there's no more threat from that colony.

To give the significant termites some names will help you better understand the rest of this book... but we're not going to emphasize names after this opening segment.

The most damaging termites are *subterranean termites*. they live and nest in the soil (sometimes inside a tree or log) but they almost always come from the soil to get into our buildings. Mound building termites are of course, subterranean. All subterranean termites obtain their necessary constant source of moisture from the soil.

Then there are *arboreal termites*.

These are the ones that build a big nest up in the branches area of a tree. They build tunnels down the outside of the tree and sometimes down the inside decaying 'pipe' to get to their moisture source. They will eat grass, leaf litter and rotting heartwood and are seldom interested in the seasoned wood of houses.

Drywood termites usually live in more tropical regions and they absorb their (lower) moisture requirements from the tropical humidity in the atmosphere. An introduced species called

Cryptotermes brevis or the West Indian drywood termite is occasionally found and is notifiable to the Australian Quarantine Service who will come and fumigate your house to eliminate it. Drywood termites live within the timber and they kick out their dry faeces through small holes in the wood they are eating. Detecting little (less than 1mm) pellets on horizontal surfaces below the activity is the usual give away.

There is a section on Nuisance Termites toward the end of this book.

The few main damaging termites.

Let's get right down to it: drywood termites, mound building termites, grass- leaf litter- and rotten wood-eating termites do less than 1% of the damage to Australian homes. The 99%+ is the result of a couple of species of *Coptotermes*, a couple of species of *Schedorhinotermes* and *Mastotermes* the giant northern termite.

How are you going to pronounce let alone remember those names? Let's do what the technicians do... call them Coptos, Schedos (pronounced Shed-o s) and Mastos.

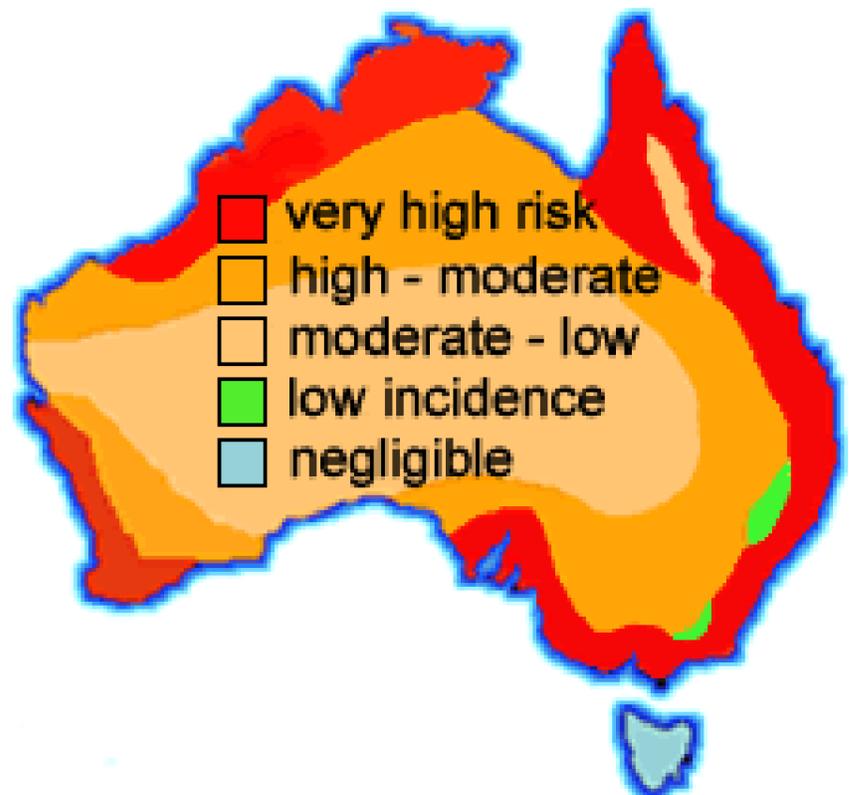
Your risk based on geography

Geographically, the Mastos are mainly found north of the Tropic of Capricorn (Rockhampton to Port Hedland), but the Coptos and Schedos are generally right through and around Australia except for Tasmania. They have spent millions of years eating Australian hardwood from trees used as framing timbers and flooring since the First Fleet 220 years ago. When oregon, baltic pine and later radiata pine and other plantation pines became widely used, our termite trio thanked us very much. They will often build tunnels over these hardwoods to get to soft timbers rather than eat their way through the hard stuff.

The chance of your home being attacked.

If you live in Tasmania, you're probably not reading this and there's no need to. For the rest of us, the only part of the mainland that is rated by the CSIRO as Low to Very Low is the narrow strip along the Great Ocean Road west of Melbourne. Which means the rest of us are in Moderate to High to Very High risk areas. Another way to put it is that there is a better than 80% chance your home is within 25 metres of a termite colony. The recent CSIRO survey reported 32% of homes had a termite presence. This has been confirmed by the Institute of Australian Architects whose survey in essence said: of all the homes inspected prior to sale last year, one third had some termite damage.

Here's another significant statistic: less than 20% of homes are inspected or serviced by the professional pest control industry. That means more than 80% of us are blithely believing "it won't happen to me".



(Australian Termite Research Centre)

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Termite Damage in Perspective(continued)

Your risk based on type of construction

Inner-city tenement style houses have common walls, often common roofs and usually suspended wooden floors... often very low to the ground. You'd think that with all the bitumen, concrete and pavers covering the ground in these crowded suburbs there would be no place for the flying colonisers to find a bit of wood in soil to start up. But they do. And, because the houses adjoin, termites may enter your home from a nest that entered a house a few doors up the street. The same goes for more modern townhouses sharing walls and roofs even though they may be on concrete slab floors.

Homesteads/ Queenslanders may have plenty of space underneath their suspended wooden floors and the piers/stumps with antcaps give you a good chance to observe termite tunnels heading up to the floor. The temptation for us humans is to stack all sorts of stuff under these houses which often gives termites something to eat at ground level and some cover for tracks heading upwards.

Rural homes are constructed of all styles but property owners have added threats: they have more sheds, cattle or sheep pens and ramps, wooden bridges, timber that 'will come in handy one day' etc.

Suburban suspended floor houses are the type which are usually set on the so-called 'quarter acre block', with brick piers and foundation walls supporting bearers, joists and flooring boards. The walls may be double brick, brick veneer, weatherboard, fibro or other cladding and a timber framed roof. If you crawled under to inspect every year, termite tunnels would be found and treatment applied before much damage was done.

Concrete slab on ground houses began in the early 1960s. They were cheaper to build and builders paid for physical and chemical termite barriers which lulled many homeowners into a false sense of termite invincibility. Now in 2011, re emphasising that only about 20% of homeowners get their homes inspected, therefore 80% of homes are just sitting there waiting for termites to attack...usually out of the garden, straight in through a weep hole just above the dampcourse and the disastrous consequences to your finances begins.

Multi-storey apartments are also attacked but termite defense is usually delegated to a Body Corporate. The BC then delegates the inspection and control to a professional pest management company. I hope for your sake the company they chose are PestCert accredited... they have reached and are maintaining the highest formal level in pest management.

The damage bill.

Archicentre show a report that says the annual damage bill to homes is about \$1billion. The average cost of professional treatment is around \$3000 and the cost of repairs is around \$5000... Total \$8000. One homeowner I know well, refinanced his home to pay a \$70,000 bill. Sure, the kitchen was one area that had to be completely rebuilt so he went the extra and put in new, more modern appliances at extra cost — but then if you were in for a big bill, another thousand or several to update your home and lifestyle could make sense.

Apart from the treatment and repairs, there is also the loss of resale value to be considered. If the prospective buyer receives a report of termite presence or even previous damage they could easily lose all interest in proceeding... or offer you maybe \$50,000 less. Then, on top of all this, how do you put a cost on the inconvenience and the heartache?

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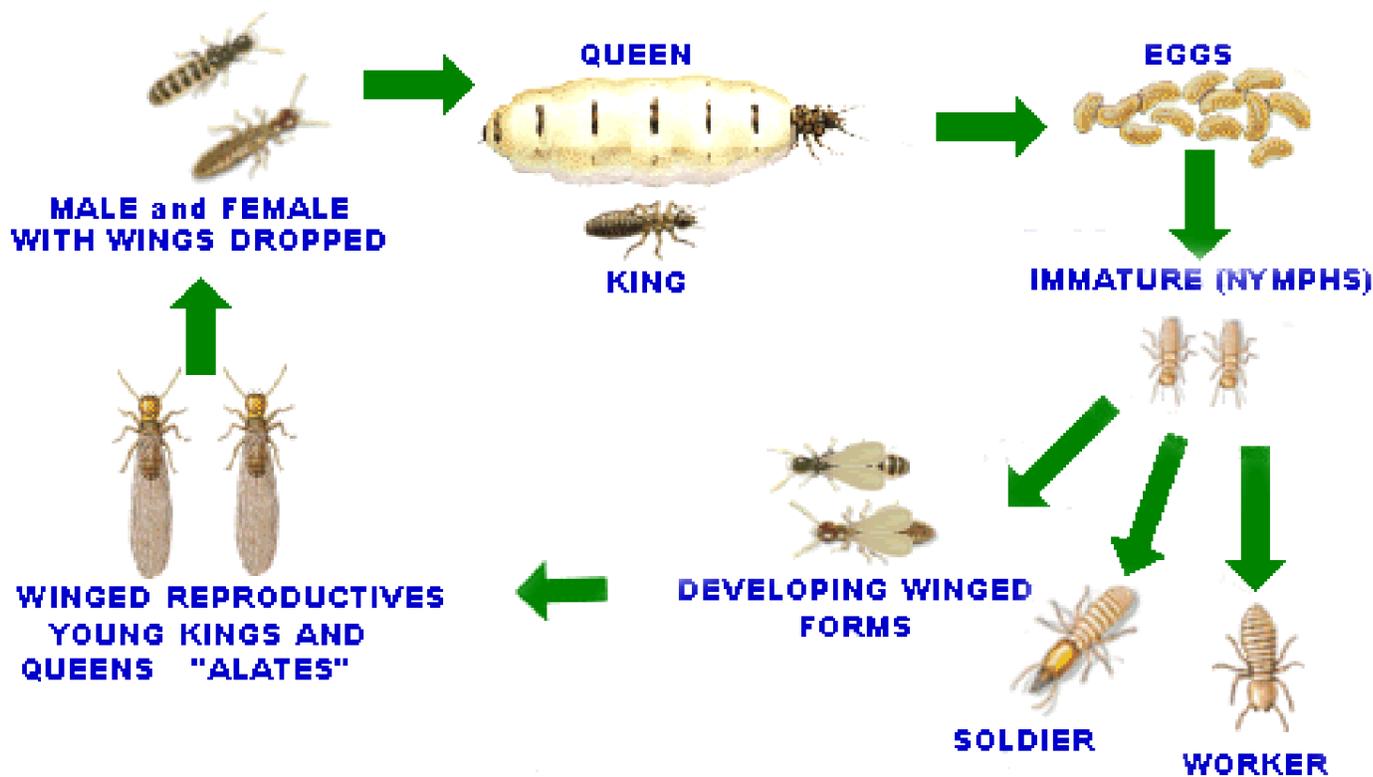
Termite Damage in Perspective(continued)

Summary

The message is plain. Unless you live in Tasmania, you should be concerned about subterranean termites.

They know where you live!

The Life Cycle of Subterranean Termites



WOW – things you may not know

Consumer Note:

- ⇒ The standard Home and Building Insurance Policy will NOT cover the repair costs of termite infested structural and decorative timbers.
- ⇒ Termites cause more damage to homes in Australia than fire, floods, storms and tempest, combined.
- ⇒ Termites are known to destroy the wall and roofing timbers of a home within 3 months of construction.

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