

Knock. Knock. It is termite swarm season again. For those of you familiar with this column, you will hear some familiar phrases this time around. Termites are knocking on the door of that cozy little home you have, so let us discuss termite warranties.

You need a termite warranty. Period. End of story. The termite threat may be different in Kansas, Michigan, wherever else you may be from, but you are probably not reading this newspaper in any of those places. You own a home here, in lovely Lillian, Alabama where Termites are, indeed, a Fact. If you do not have a termite warranty, you are gambling with the structural integrity, and value, of your home. Termites will find a way to eat any unprotected wood. You will pay sooner or later because *every* house that's unprotected will experience some form of termite activity. Such activity could be tomorrow or 10 years down the road, there's just no predicting Mother Nature, as weathermen will surely tell you.

Now, I'm not stressing this point to cause you to run out and frantically purchase a warranty if you don't have one. Please, please make an informed decision. Fiscally speaking however, it doesn't not make sense to spend several thousand dollars on your home and then not protect it. It's like locking the front door but leaving the windows open.

Homeowner's insurance does not cover termite damage. Water, fire, sometimes flooding may be covered but not termite damage. Since termites typically enter a structure from the ground level, imagine having to repair a damaged floor. Floor joists can be an expensive proposition. Think of your termite warranty like you do your car insurance. Both are there to protect you if something goes wrong.

Termites do play an important role in nature, breaking down fallen trees into usable soil for new trees. They help clean up after hurricanes and big storms. Termites are a part of our environment. So if you wake up one balmy spring morning to find termite swarms all over your porch, don't panic. "Swarms" are winged, reproductive termites, sent forth by a mature colony to perpetuate the species and start a new colony somewhere else.

Swarms cannot live long out of the soil. Termites need high levels of moisture to maintain their internal body structure. Too long out of the ground and they will 'desiccate', or die of a lack of moisture. A gust of wind could have blown those swarms up on your porch from some nearby woods. And no matter where you live in Lillian, you're not all that far from someone's woods.

If, on the other hand, you wake up one balmy spring morning to hundreds of swarms IN your house, all around your doors, windows and that TV you forgot to turn off last night, you should be a little more concerned. Swarms inside the home means that termites are nearby. In some cases, a colony could be using an old access route to swarm from, instead of building new tunnels. Why should the termites do more work than they have to? But it's more likely that if there are hundreds of termite swarms in your home, the main colony is too.

Homeowners can reduce the risk for termite attack by: Eliminating wood to ground contact! Wood on the ground is an open invitation to termites. Be aware that pressure-treated wood is not immune to termite attack because termites can enter through the cut ends and build tunnels over the surfaces. Never store firewood, lumber, or other wood debris against the foundation or inside the crawl space. Again, you're just rolling out the welcome mat. Use decorative wood chips and mulch sparingly. That's what rubber mulch is for, and you get a double whammy for the environment as the rubber mulch is made out of recycled tires!

Control the moisture in and around your home! Do not allow moisture to accumulate near the home's foundation. Proper drainage, repair of plumbing, and proper grading will help to reduce the presence of moisture, which attracts termites. Reduce humidity in crawl spaces. Proper vent placement design includes positioning one vent within 3 feet of each building corner.

And lastly, have the structure treated by a professional termite control treatment! This is the final, and most effective, strategy to prevent infestation of the soil. The treated ground becomes toxic to termites and very little else. Modern science has tailored termiticides and pest control chemicals to have affects on insects specifically. We're a long way from the DDT days where one spray kills everything in a 100 meter radius.

Do all these things and draw in the welcome mat, and close and lock those open windows. Protect your home and investment. After all, you know what a termite's favorite breakfast is, don't you? Oak-meal!