

Mighty mites take their bites

Termites. The word strikes fear in the minds of homebuyers, ripping their hearts and setting their souls aqvier.

They sit anxiously in closings awaiting the delivery of the feared and revered "termite letter." Upon its arrival, the closing attorney peruses the familiar verbiage and informs the buyers of the exterminator's findings. If the letter is clear — i.e., there was no evidence of active infestation — the buyers breathe a sigh of relief and the closing continues.

If, however, there was evidence of active infestation, the closing attorney will send for the defibrillator, as cardiac arrest will quickly ensue. As the buyers writhe and moan in agony over the diagnosis, they begin the process of determining whether or not they are desirous of purchasing the now-stigmatized home.

The fact is that buyers should want the termite letter to reflect that the inspector actually found termites due to the fact that most real estate contracts require treatment if there are termites or other wood-destroying insects present. A clear termite letter means that no termites chose to rear their ugly heads, set their cute little wings in motion and fly into the face of the representative from the pest control company. There are, in fact, termites present at every property in town.

The pests must have originated in Afghanistan, as they are bin Ladenish in their ability to not be seen. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, there are about 25 termite colonies per acre in this area. Therefore, on a half-acre lot, there exists the probability that there are 12 colonies with upwards to 1 million termites and/or eggs per colony. That equates to approximately 12 million termites on an average lot in Davidson County.

Now, the good news: Termites are not an endangered species. They

COMMENTARY



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can be killed with no guilt or legal ramifications.

Perhaps somewhat generically, the companies that rid properties of termites are called "pest" control companies. However, to label a termite as a "pest" is a bit of an understatement. Fleas are pests. Termites are more on the "axis of evil level," insects that can lead a charge into a home and consume most of the lumber in said home within a matter of hours.

Formerly, pest control people were known as exterminators. They wield weapons of mass destruction and care not what Germany and France think of the situation. The French would more than likely sweep the termite carcasses into a bowl, throw a little melted chocolate on them and serve them as dessert.

Throughout the 1970s, '80s and '90s, termite letters were merely a formality. The contract called for a clear letter, and the pest control companies were quick to oblige. Only in rare occasions were termites observed. Today, the opposite is true. If a house is not under a treatment plan, nine times out of 10, termites are present

Anyone who buys a house should contact a termite control company immediately after closing. It should be the first call, even before changing the utilities. Cable television is worthless if the television is buried under a heap of sawdust and termite

drippings. The power of a swarm of termites is awesome. They can destroy the framing of a room in a house within a few hours. They are a stealthy lot, chomping voraciously on their meals in inaudible fashion. Their mothers have taught them good manners. They eat quietly with their mouths closed and never speak with food in their mouths.

Before entering into a contract with a pest control company, the consumer should be ensured that the company would be responsible for repairs should the treatment fail. In some contracts, the company agrees only to re-treat (not retreat) the property if the termites invade but is not liable for repairing the damage done during the assault. The consumer should enter into an agreement only with a company that will repair the devastation left in the wake of these voracious insects.

There are various types of treatment, excluding outlawed Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT), a chemical that took all the sport out of extermination. DDT treatment was like fishing with dynamite. Everything dies: termites, rats, snakes, dogs, small children, the elderly. Biochemical warfare before it came into vogue.

Now there is an environmentally friendly chemical, Fipronil, which can differentiate between termites and mammals. This agent is marketed most commonly under the name Termidore, according to Thomas Cothorn with Action Pest Control. Beware the termites are upon us. Nothing is safe. CP

Richard Courtney is a real estate broker with Fridrich and Clark Realty and can be reached at Richard @richardcourtney.com.

Tonight, he will dine upon a filet of Southern pine encrusted in pecan bark with an elm based demiglaze. The dessert will feature a dozen chocolate termites with mold and fungus sauce.