

HARVESTER TERMITES / HODOTERMITIDAE by Johan Fourie

I have been working in the Wood-Destroying (WDO) inspection industry for more than 15 years. My service areas include the Cape Peninsula and the Boland Winelands. Recently I have been noticing more and more Harvester termites invading homes, factories and business premises with their activities, entering these properties through cracks, weep holes, electrical DB boards, socket outlets, skirting's, doorframes and sub-floors. They excavate timber in their way and in some instances also destroy the timber.

During Wood Destroying Organism (WDO) inspections, some inspectors include Harvester termites, while other neglects to report them. This results in double standards in the industry, which leads to home buyers being very unhappy once they move into their homes and finding Harvester termite activity, even though a WDO Clearance Certificate had been issued. This result in the industry being associated and blamed for incomplete services rendered. As Chairman: SAPCA Western Cape I have been involved with numerous complaints regarding this from unhappy home buyers. I have seen frustrated WDO Inspectors struggling with these double standards on handling Harvester Termites, this again resulting in a poor reflection on the industry itself.

Because of added pressure from home buyers, WDO Inspectors some Transferring Attorneys allow properties to be treated against Harvester Termite infestation prior to transfer. The WDO Inspectors in the Western and Southern Cape therefore mandated me as Chairperson in the Western Cape to investigate and to look into an all inclusive policy on handling Harvester termites in an effective and professional manner.

In this regard I consulted with Entomologists, Chemical suppliers and trusted and competent WDO inspectors in the Western-, Southern- and Eastern Cape. Jaco Scheepers, Rentokill Entomologist: Cape Town comments in this regard: "It is true that Harvester termites forage for grass and twigs, but an argument can still be made that they are wood-destroying organisms." Jaco says it is an extremely common occurrence, especially in the Western Cape, for Harvester termites to surface inside a residence, coming up behind a skirting board and coming into contact with wood, excavating timber and taking it back to the nest. He explains: "Harvester termites push up a lot of moist soil, also causing wood to rot, introducing fungal spores to wood, which can lead to wood decay. Harvester termites may not attack wood directly, however they can cause damage to wood, when they come into contact with it." This evidence of the habitant change or Harvester termites compels us to change our perspective on them in the WDO Inspection Industry.

More and more houses in the Western, Southern and Eastern Cape are being invaded by Harvester termites, causing damage to joinery, door frames and other timber. SAPCA has



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therefore decided to include Harvester termites in the “beetle clause” and WDO Inspectors will have to treat them as wood destroying organisms. Going forward WDO Inspections have to include Harvester termites in SAPCA’s full disclosure inspection report. Properties infested by Harvester termites will therefore have to be treated before a Clearance Certificate can be issued. This will result in rendering a professional and efficient service, protecting the buyer’s rights, as well as the integrity of the woodborer inspection profession, which is to what we as SAPCA members should always strive to do. The classification of Harvester termites as wood destroying organisms will ensure that potential home buyers will have total peace of mind when a clearance certificate had been issued.

Should you wish to add any additional supporting information on this issue of Harvester termites, please to not hesitate to contact me.

Special thanks to Jaco Scheepers, Entomologist: Rentokill Cape Town for his valuable contribution in this regard.



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