



An introduction to soil poisoning for first-time home builders

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You've dreamt about this moment for years. Owning your very own piece of prime property and building the home of your dreams is about to become a reality. Before your abode starts to take shape however, it's wise to do a bit of research about the not-so-glamorous requirements involved in building a house. As they say, failing to prepare is preparing to fail. If you want to make sure that your investment is one that's built to last, school yourself on one of the most important (yet surprisingly, oft-ignored) considerations of building: soil poisoning.

Soil poisoning, also known as subterranean termite control, is one of the most crucial factors to consider when building a new structure.

Unbeknownst to many South Africans, subterranean termites cause millions of rands in damage annually, compromising the structural integrity of homes built on erf that's either been untreated or undergone inefficient treatment. These silent pests are able to chew their way through wooden structures and, if left to their own devices, eventually cause the collapse of eaves, beams and other supporting structures.

Soil poisoning is one of the very first steps in the building process.

Prior to the laying of your foundations, the ground beneath your future home needs to be treated for subterranean

termites. Just prior to the concrete slab being poured, an approved termiticide is applied according to the label specification, usually 5 liters / m² (mixed 1:100). It's crucial that this is done by a pest control company that's registered with the South African Pest Control Association (SAPCA). This will ensure that the treatment is done thoroughly, is effectively carried out and that chemicals are used in a manner which is safe to humans and animals.

Many building contractors who attempt to conduct soil poisoning themselves use banned chemicals which are incredibly toxic.

Frighteningly, chemicals like DDT and Chlordane are still being used by builders. These toxic substances, banned due to their hazardous nature, can cause cancer, leukemia, neurological disorders and chronic respiratory problems. Even if a contractor uses a termiticide that's registered with the South African Bureau of Standards, many use much less than the recommended amount, resulting in an ineffective treatment. It's therefore essential that you make use of a registered pest control service in order to avoid putting the health of your family and neighbours at risk.

Subterranean termites are found throughout South Africa, with a few exceptions.

Besides areas in the Western Cape – roughly the coast from Cape Town

to Port Elizabeth – subterranean termites are found throughout the country, with the tropical climate in Kwa-Zulu Natal being particularly appealing to these pests. That said, subterranean termite populations can be found in unlikely areas, which means that before you begin laying your foundations, it's advised that a reputable pest control company assesses your erf regardless of your property's location. This will ensure that your future home is safeguarded against any potential threat – from subterranean termites or other critters who make their home underground.

Steer clear of any soil poisoning provider who offers more than a five year guarantee.

Since the use of Chlordane was banned, termiticides approved by the SABS are only guaranteed for five years. Any one claiming to offer soil poisoning services that last longer than this is either using banned substances, using dangerously high levels of approved termiticides or downright lying.

Once your property has undergone subterranean termite control, a registered company will provide you with a certificate that guarantees the poisoning of your soil for five years.

Once this period is up, it's advisable to conduct the process again in order to prevent your home from falling prey to these wily creatures.