

TERMITE CONTROL METHODOLOGY: A CRITICAL VIEW

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As any university student knows, critical evaluation is an important part of the scientific process. In scientific publication, anonymous peer review is practiced to ensure honest and critical appraisal of assumptions, hypotheses, study methodology, and interpretations of research results. Yet, this underlying philosophy of critical appraisal rarely carries over to the end-users of these research results or to the public at large. Scientists tend to see every research project as a continuous process in which we are always adding to our knowledge of the system and modifying our theories and recommendations as necessary. On the other hand, the end-users of technology are generally totally unaware of any equivocations in the scientific literature and tend to assume that if the technology is available then it is scientifically proven. This view is supported by marketers, who fully realize that most people do not want to take the time to thoroughly understand a process, they just want to know whether or not they should use it. In other words, researchers are always working to define the parameters of a technological process, and rightly so, but our clients usually think in simpler terms of whether or not it works.

Researchers in urban pest management, and in termite control in particular, need to recognize this dichotomy of views and address it with each other and with the pest control industry. As we develop new methodology such as baiting systems, and even new soil insecticides and wood preservatives, we need to specifically identify the weak points in these new methodologies; actively address those points in research, conference presentations and articles; and develop clear recommendations and risk/benefit comparisons for the end-users. This is more difficult to accomplish than it should be in an age of patent concerns, competition for research funds, and competition for market share. This paper is intended as a critical examination of assumptions behind current and proposed termite control methodologies, and an attempt to identify some points of concern that require discussion. It is hoped that this workshop at the 1996 Conference on Insect Pests in the Urban Environment will help to bridge the communication gap between research and application and represent a step towards realistic use of pest management tools to accomplish the goal of termite control.