

Property Guarantee Administration



Assessment, Identification and Control of Woodworm

Part 4: Considerations and procedures for preservative spray treatment of timbers built into a property.

1.0: Introduction:

The treatment of timbers against wood boring beetle infestation within a roof void (attic), or those forming a floor or staircase are the most basic treatment procedures undertaken within a property. For any treatment against wood boring beetle infestation to be effective the same principle applies: all accessible timber surfaces must be coated with the correct level of active ingredient.

The word accessible is important. Obviously in an existing structure it is impractical to gain access to all timber surfaces unless partial or complete dismantling takes place. This does not usually present a problem as limited opening up by raising floorboards etc. will gain access to most timber surfaces. Those surfaces that remain inaccessible to a correctly specified treatment programme will almost certainly be inaccessible to an adult wood boring beetle so the risk associated with no treatment reaching these surfaces is very small.

We would only advise that a water based insecticidal timber preservative be used for spray application. Whilst solvent based preservatives that use white spirit as their carrier are still available, we would advise against their use as the fire risk associated with white spirit and the vapour it produces is considerable.

There is now very little justification for the use of any solvent based materials when treating timbers already built into a structure. The only exception to this would be the injection of a solvent based material when dealing with a Death Watch or House Longhorn beetle infestation. The main justification for using a solvent based material in these circumstances is that it is known to have a higher initial kill rate due to the action of the solvent vapours. For spray applications water based technology is now at such an advanced level that it more than equals and often supersedes old fashioned solvent based materials.

All suggestions and advice with regard to spray treatment in this manual assume a water based material will be used.

2.0 Wood preservatives and the law

Before any wood preservative is used there are certain important and reassuring points that should be understood by anyone who will be responsible for carrying out timber treatment:

1. Wood preservatives are pesticides. It is only permissible in the UK to use a pesticide product that has been approved by Government under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986 (COPR).
2. All pesticide products must by law display a label that contains the following:

- Product Name and HSE number
- Restriction of use phrase
- Risk phrases
- Name and concentration of active ingredients
- Direction for use
- Precautions
- Hazard warning symbols
- Name and address of company marketing the product
- Details of pack size
- In certain circumstances a batch number
- Approvals phrase

The information that must be displayed under each of these headings is too detailed for the purposes of this manual.

It is the law that all pesticide products must be used strictly in accordance with the instructions contained on the label as they are a statement of the conditions under which approval has been given.

Full compliance with other relevant legislation such as the Health and Safety at Work etc Act, the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations, the Wildlife and Countryside Act, the Water Act and the Environmental Protection Act must be adhered to when using, handling or storing a pesticide product.

Provided wood preservatives are used in accordance with the instructions on the label there is virtually no risk to the individual or the environment.

3.0: General Treatment Considerations:

Having established that treatment is necessary and before any treatment takes place certain basic fundamental principles apply.

3.1: Assess the implications of the intended treatment.

The implications of any proposed treatment should always be assessed prior to treatment commencing.

Considerations such as who is likely to be affected, what the area is used for, are any special precautions required, are any special or unusual conditions present etc. Under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH) there is a legal requirement for anyone proposing to use a hazardous material to undertake and record various assessments and to take appropriate precautions prior to using such a material. Make certain that you are aware of your responsibilities.

3.2: Product selection.

Only select and use a product that is designed specifically for the purpose of the treatment. If you are treating because of a wood boring beetle infestation then use an insecticide only. There is no point or justification in using a 'dual purpose' insecticide and fungicide in these circumstances. To do so would be the unnecessary use of a biocide, expose the user to a fungicide without reason and if guarantees are involved it could throw the guarantee net wider than intended. Effective control of wood rotting fungi is far more than a simple spray treatment.

3.3: Read the label

Always fully read the label of any pesticide before use. Be fully aware of all the health and safety factors relevant to the use of such a product. Also be aware of the dust hazard much of the preparation work causes and take the appropriate precautions.

3.4 Personal Protective Equipment

Prior to the commencement of preparatory work and treatment make certain that all items relevant to personal safety such as the correct mask, coveralls, gloves, goggles, footwear etc are in satisfactory condition and worn when appropriate. Consider the safety of others whom either directly or indirectly may be affected by the proposed treatment and advise accordingly.

3.5 Electricity

Being a liquid, spray applied preservative is able to accumulate in electrical junction boxes. For this reason it is necessary to wrap and tape electrical junction boxes and other vulnerable fittings to prevent any preservative from entering them.

Turn off electricity in the area in which treatment is to be undertaken. Electricity for lighting and pumps should be obtained from a different circuit. Do not reconnect electrical circuits until you are satisfied that the preservative is dry.

3.6: Dust hazard

Prior to the application of a preservative always remove as much dust as possible from timber surfaces designated for treatment. If the dust is not removed then it is likely that the dust will contain most of the active ingredient being applied – not the underlying wood. In addition subsequent removal or disturbance of the dust by others at a later date will introduce pesticide laden dust into the air and those responsible may not be aware of the hazardous atmosphere in which they are present.

3.7: Pets

Some wood preservatives are harmful to fish and other pets. All pets should always be temporarily removed from properties where treatment is to be carried out.

3.8: Bats

It is important to note that Bats are protected by law. If there is evidence that bats use the area where treatment is proposed then it is necessary to notify the local office of English Nature, or the Scottish or Welsh equivalent, of the bat colony and the planned treatment. A reasonable period of time must be allowed for the office to offer advice.

3.9: Inform someone else

If you are to be alone in a property whilst applying treatment then for your own safety inform someone else what you intend to do. If necessary arrange to 'call in' at specific times.

4.0: Roof Void (Attic) Treatment Process

Roof void treatment is normally confined to the accessible structural timbers within a roof void. Other timbers sometimes visible/present in a roof void such as timber laths supporting the ceiling below or slate/tile battens are not normally included in the treatment though some 'fall out' benefit of the treatment may be achieved. In addition to the items already mentioned in Section 3, the following sections 4.1 to 4.10 explain how to undertake treatment of timbers within a roof void.

- 4.1** Display appropriate warning notices at entry points into the property and into the roof void to warn others what is happening and has happened and what precautions they should take.
- 4.2** Install adequate special safety lighting immune to the effects of spraying.
- 4.3** Cover any exposed water tanks with plastic sheeting taped into position and then cover again with a designated dustsheet.
- 4.4** Remove all debris, insulation and stored items likely to obstruct access to any of the structural timber surfaces.

- 4.5 Carry out any necessary repairs applying localised treatment by brush to any timber surfaces that will be concealed by the repairs.
- 4.6 Raise adequate boarding and remove any other moveable obstructions if present to gain access to concealed structural timber surfaces.
- 4.7 Clean all exposed structural timber surfaces that are to receive treatment so that they are as far as practically possible free of dust.
- 4.8 Use a coarse low pressure to spray to apply the preservative to all accessible structural timber surfaces at the application rate designated on the product label.
- 4.9 Reinststate any disturbed boarding.
- 4.10 Remove dustsheet from water tanks but leave plastic in position for removal later if necessary.

5.0: Floor Treatment Process

Floor treatment is normally confined to the accessible structural timbers forming the floor. Other timbers sometimes visible/present in a floor void such as timber laths supporting a ceiling below are not normally included in the treatment though some 'fall out' benefit of the treatment may be achieved. In addition to the items already mentioned in Section 3, the following sections 5.1 to 5.9 explain how to undertake treatment of timbers forming a floor.

It is important to note that just treating the top surface of a floor without raising floorboards to treat sub floor timbers and the undersides of the floorboards is not what is regarded as full floor treatment and will be of little benefit.

- 5.1 Display appropriate warning notices at entry points into the property to warn others what is happening or has happened and what precautions they should take.
- 5.2 Completely clear the floor areas of all furnishings, floor coverings or other items that will restrict access to the floor.
- 5.3 Carry out all necessary repairs ensuring that all surfaces to be made inaccessible by the repairs receive treatment before fixing.
- 5.4 Unless access beneath the floor from a sub-floor void or a cellar is possible, gain access to the sub floor timbers by raising sufficient floorboards across the entire width of a room. This is usually several floorboards the full width of a room at approximately 1 metre centres.

- 5.5 At ground floor level raise floorboards as near to wall plates as possible and adjacent to outside walls and solid floors. This enables dust to be removed from the top of wall plates and sub-floor timbers in these vulnerable areas to be examined in greater detail for the possible presence of fungal decay.
- 5.6 At first floor level care should be taken to ensure that solid strutting or trimmers within the floor void do not obstruct access for the treatment.
- 5.7 All timber surfaces should be cleaned of dust as far as practically possible.
- 5.8 Use a coarse low pressure spray to apply the preservative to all accessible top and sub floor timber surfaces at the application rate designated on the product label.
- 5.9 The spray application procedure for a floor with ceilings fitted beneath and when access from the sub floor void is not possible is as follows:

Raise floorboards in accordance with 5.4/5.5 above. Introduce the preservative applying spray lance between each of the joists exposed and manoeuvre it so that all accessible surfaces of the joists, accessible wall plates and underside of floorboards are coated. Repeat this procedure in both directions for each floorboard raised. Prior to relaying, the underside of the raised boards should be coated then re-fixed into position. Finally the top surface should be swept clean and coated.

6.0: Staircase Treatment Process

Much of the top surface of most staircases is usually painted and it is common for the underside to be lined with plaster or boarding (a soffit). In addition many glued wedges and triangular blocks will have been used in the construction of a staircase and invariably one, if not both of the strings are against a wall making access for treatment extremely difficult. Because of these restrictions it is seldom possible to achieve full effective treatment of an in situ staircase.

- 6.1 If no soffit is present timber surfaces should be cleaned down and all accessible unpainted top and underside surfaces should be coated with preservative in accordance with the application rate designated on the product label.

- 6.2** If a soffit is present preventing access to the underside drill two 10-mm holes through each riser along a central line, equidistant from each string and each other. Attach a stair back spray nozzle to the spray lance. Introduce the stair back spray nozzle into each hole and squeeze the spray lance trigger for approximately five seconds rotating the lance from left to right at the same time to maximise coating potential.

7.0: Treatment of Joinery

Invariably joinery is painted and the reverse surface is inaccessible thus the application of effective treatment is not possible unless the timber is removed and the paint stripped. In most circumstances this is not a cost effective option and renewal using treated timber is the preferred course of action. Limited treatment by injecting flight holes is possible but not fully effective.

8.0: General Notes on Spray Treatment

Very often access to the surface of timber already built into a structure to enable treatment to take place is physically restricted or limited. Probably the most common restriction is painted or varnished timber surfaces. Other physical restrictions are part of the original building structure such as sound insulation (deadening), plaster board, lath and plaster, linings etc. More modern restrictions are being introduced such as laminate floors, glued down thermoplastic tiles and ceramic tiles, all of which make access impossible without incurring considerable expense.

For treatment to effectively control woodworm all surfaces of a piece of timber must be coated with the preservative at the prescribed rate. In a mature property restricted access to some of the timber surfaces will almost certainly be present. Each situation will need to be assessed and a judgement made on the level of preparation required to enable treatment to be as effective as practically possible.

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