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**Centre Wellington Township continues to be bugged by termite problems**

*by David Meyer*

**ELORA -**

They munch, they chew and they can make a mess out of a homeowner's house - or wallet. Termites were back on the agenda at the Centre Wellington committee of the whole meeting on June 14 when building inspector Bob Foster reported there has been enough activity in the township to make him recommend sending homeowners in infested areas a brochure each spring to help them protect their homes.

Foster told council termites have been in Elora and Fergus since the 1970s. The termite infested zone in Elora affects 813 homes, and another 389 houses in Fergus.

Foster said the last time he discussed the issue, there was a suggestion for the county to open one of its now-closed dumps so that contaminated soil and wood could be disposed of there. He noted the only nearby legal disposal sights are Sarnia and St. Thomas and, with a \$72 per tonne tipping fee, hauling away the problem is really expensive.

Foster noted Guelph has major problems with the bugs too, and it has a place that converts termite-infested wood into energy. He said if Wellington County allowed an old, finished gravel pit as a place to dump contaminated dirt, termites would likely die before they reached wood, which is their only food.

Council also heard from Foster that chemicals that are legal today are not solving the problems and that Americans allow the use of more potent chemicals to deal with the bugs.

Councillor Kirk McElwain said a Water Street resident in Elora has been dealing with the bugs and researching them.

Pat Ellis told council she spent \$5,000 this year to have the ground around her house embedded with 30 litres of chemicals that will keep the bugs out, and trap the ones that are already inside the house. She said the move does not get rid of the bugs, but serves only as a barrier, and she noted the chemical she used is the only one legal in Canada. It might last up to three years or more.

Ellis said the termites might devalue houses on Water Street by \$100,000 because the bugs reduce a home's appeal to buyers.

Ellis said ten years ago council was asked to help exterminate the bugs and residents were turned down.

"We have a problem in this area," she said. "Five thousand dollars is quite a burden. The province used to help."

Councillor Shawn Watters said the issue is getting people to think about what they are doing that might encourage or hinder termites.

Ellis gave an example of how termites can spread to unsuspecting homeowners. She said crews often cut down trees and turn the wood into mulch, which is taken to transfer stations and given away for free. People take it and spread it on their properties and if that tree had termites in it, the bugs are then spread all over the community.

She noted the local horticultural society has used mulch all over the community for years.

"You have to be aware," she said, noting that mulch is like caviar to termites.

Foster agreed that wood chip mulches are bad for spreading termites, but said the bugs like some mulches and do not like others.

He maintains a list of termite-resistant mulches on the township's building department web page. He added that all-bark mulch is something termites do not like, as is ground up coconut shells.

He said that information will be included in the brochure the department is preparing. He said it will be sent in hydro bills in spring, just prior to termites starting their annual move after winter.

Foster added termites have been in Ontario since the 1920s, and Guelph has nearly 900 properties infested with them. Kitchener and Cambridge have had them for years, and Waterloo has just learned they are in that city, too.

"It's a management issue," Foster said.

Council approved the brochure unanimously. Councillor Ron Hallman was absent.

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