

HOT IDEA

A Camarillo firm's new pest-control method is making termites feel the heat. **B1**

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THE BUSINESS BEAT**Feeling the Heat****For Termites, New Pest-Control Method Not Just Hot Air**

By **MATT SURMAN**
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CAMARILLO—To a person it would feel like nothing more than a gigantic hair dryer—a constantly pumping stream of hot air. But according to the company that blasts it, the hot air is a death sentence to the little critters munching on the foundation of the Trembleys' house.

Precision Works, the Camarillo-based "environmental remediation" company—has covered the side of the family home with a little tent, hooked up some duct flexes—basically gigantic heat pumps—and is making life mighty uncomfortable for a tribe of termites.

It takes only six minutes for them to die in the wilting heat, according to David Hedman,

chairman of Precision Works.

In an industry that still relies heavily on chemicals, the company is at the forefront of this heat treatment, a system of pest control

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that virtually boils away the voracious eaters and other creepy-crawlies with jets of 150-degree air.

And now, the company's officers say, their treatment is proving useful in destroying bacteria, viruses—including the hantavirus—and

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Air as hot as 150 degrees is pumped through ducts to kill termites.

BEAT: New Pest Control Could Be Next Hot Thing

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molds that could contribute to health problems.

"We realized that this could be important for environmental remediation," said Hedman. "We just ran right out to the patent office."

Precision Works is one of 20 companies licensed in California to use the treatment for killing pests. About half of Precision Works' business now is in heat treatment—four or five homes or offices a week.

And with a year of experimentation behind it, the company plans to start demonstrating the process to other firms in March, said Hedman, with the aim of creating a mini-empire of licensees.

The heat treatment is considered to be on the fringe of pest control in a state that still depends on chemicals, according to Donna Kingwell at the California Structural Pest Control Board. And nobody's talking about killing viruses with heat as the next sanitary revolution.

But, experts say, Precision Works techniques make sense and could be useful.

"I think they really have something," said Dick Davis, a biologist with the state's Department of Health Services.

It could be especially helpful, said Davis, in dealing with hantavirus, which is transmitted through rodent droppings. Humans contract the disease when the droppings are swept up, and they breathe in the virus-laden dust particles.

In most cases, people clean for hantavirus by dampening the dust—to make sure it doesn't fly up in clouds—and cleaning the area with bleach. That works. But, for those very worried, the heat technique means no direct contact with the virus.

"It stands to reason that this is a good thing," Davis said.

It is also a method preferred by those worried about the environmental impacts of pesticides, experts said.

"The one thing I've learned in this business is that everyone's tolerance is different for different things," said Alan Forbess, a manager at West Coast Environmental & Engineering in Ventura. "But heat is about as natural as you can get, and it seems to be preferable to spraying a bunch of chemicals."

Forbess said that one drawback to the heat treatment is that fungi or pests can come back. But that's also true with pesticides, Hedman said.

Over the years, Hedman said, as the consequences of pesticide exposure have become known, the state has restricted their use. "We learn that they're more and more dangerous than we thought," Hedman said.

The heat process uses no chemicals. The entire house need not be tented, since workers heat only the part of the house where there is a problem. The pets can stay in the yard.

Mom must remove her lipsticks. Dad should stick his candy bars in the refrigerator. Junior should take his crayons to school. But, Hedman says, besides those easily melted items, the heat doesn't warp the wood, or set it aflame.

At Tony Trembley's house, life goes on, while termites are killed in the walls. His dogs play in the backyard. He prepares to head off to work.

"When you're a homeowner with two kids you want something that's not invasive," he said. "I don't think people know anything about this."



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Cesar Caro of Precision Works checks temperature probes.