

ONE AND DONE

Spiders eliminated by fumigation create new market in Missouri

You may have gotten the heebie-jeebies from reading the national headlines last fall about a Missouri home that was infested with an estimated 6,000 brown recluse spiders. McCarthy Pest & Termite Control in Saint Charles, Missouri, came under the social media spotlight after word spread about this nightmare home and the company's fumigation of it.

Bob Richardson, McCarthy's staff entomologist, still can't believe it. "It was incredible," he says of the media's interest. "There were two stories done locally, and then it just went viral. It was international. We were hearing from people in Europe — Spain, England, all over the place. My son is a news anchor in Eugene, Oregon, and he called to tell me I was on the air there!"

The story began in 2007, when the home on the grounds of the Whitmoor Country Club was purchased by a family who didn't stay long. The brown recluse spider infestation showed itself shortly after the family moved in. "Two or three different pest control companies tried to do the 'spray and pray' method before the home went into foreclosure," he says. "The family did some research and realized that these treatments were not going to work. They moved out because they saw this was an ongoing problem, and they didn't want their child in that environment."

The bank that owned the home after the foreclosure paid McCarthy Pest Control



McCarthy Pest & Termite Control now offers brown recluse spider fumigation.

to fumigate the home. Admittedly, not a lot of fumigation work is done in Missouri. So the staff at McCarthy Pest Control needed some help and some education.

"(Owner) Tim McCarthy and I sat down, and we wondered if there was any technology that we could employ to start killing all the brown recluse spiders and their eggs in this house," Richardson says. "We knew then that fumigation was the solution if the spider was actually on the label of Vikane® gas fumigant, so it would be legal to do so. So we checked, and, indeed, the dosage to control the adult brown



An estimated 6,000 brown recluse spiders infested this Missouri home.

recluse spider is listed in the manual for Vikane, which is part of the labeling."

McCarthy Pest Control contacted Dow AgroSciences to determine a dosage to control the egg stage. Dow AgroSciences had assisted with monitoring buildings fumigated with Vikane gas fumigant for control of recluse spider infestations in Louisiana, Illinois, and Florida.

Fumigation with Vikane at the 10x dosage factor controlled all life stages of recluse spiders because recluse spiders were not found in the buildings during one or more years of monitoring post-fumigation. The next thing was to learn how to do it.

"Bob Braun, our rep from Dow AgroSciences, told us about the School of Structural Fumigation, so we flew down to the University of Florida

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Roaches on the Rush: workers fumigate U.S. Coast Guard vessel

Fumigating a boat on the water is no big deal for Sandwich Isle Pest Solutions in Pearl City, Hawaii. After all, the island chain has plenty of boats, and a 75-footer would be a typical big task. But fumigating a five-story, 378-foot ship takes the job to a whole new level.

This particular ship, the USCGC Rush, had a serious German cockroach infestation. During decommission (the U.S. Coast Guard was selling it to the Bangladesh Navy), the infestation required immediate attention. Ian Mateo, general manager of Sandwich Isle Pest Solutions, says workers used Vikane® gas fumigant at a 1x rate to eliminate the roaches.

“The roaches probably got on board through corrugated cardboard,” Mateo says. “They had broken down some cardboard that was stored, and it created a good breeding ground for the German roaches. It will pose a health risk if enough of them are around, especially if you’re living on the boat. It could cause problems for people with asthma, allergies, and things like that.”

Because of the size of the USCGC Rush, wrapping the boat in a tent for fumigation was impractical. It had to be a tape-and-seal job, Mateo says.



The vessel was taped-and-sealed.



A German cockroach infestation on the USCGC Rush required immediate attention.

“It was really the only way it could be done,” Mateo says. “There were certain parts of the boat that were too tall, so we couldn’t get equipment up there to drop a tarp on. Plus, a boat that is full time on the water is pretty moist, so it was challenging to keep everything tight.”

Timing was a factor during the fumigation in fall 2014. Hurricane Iselle was racing toward Hawaii, so the Coast Guard took the ship from the Port of Honolulu out to sea to avoid the storm. Several weeks passed before Sandwich Isle workers could get started.

Another challenge: how to comply with Vikane label regulations for safety. Security guards were the answer. “How do you put secondary locks on a boat?” Mateo says, laughing. “That was one issue. We decided to post guards around the boat.”

Mateo says he and Sandwich Isle worked closely with the Coast Guard

prior to the fumigation to make sure all proper procedures were followed.

“We had two prefumigation meetings with the Coast Guard and a full walk-through of the vessel with their team, twice, before we started this job,” Mateo says, and he adds that all food and medicinal supplies were taken off the ship before the fumigation.

The most difficult part of this job, hands down, was the tight spaces, Mateo says.

“I thought a five-story boat has only five ways to get down and around,” he says. “But there are rooms within rooms and hatches within hatches. It took three hours to walk through the boat and clear it all after the fumigation. We were climbing through hatches and going through engine rooms and ammunition rooms. They gave me a map ahead of time and dedicated one person to come with me. We went into every nook and cranny in the boat.”

A team of six handled the job, starting at 8 a.m. They introduced the gas at 7 p.m. Roman Dycus, sales representative for Dow AgroSciences, helped with calculations for the application rate for Vikane and the taping and sealing of the ship.

“This was a challenging job,” Dycus says. “The most challenging was finding and sealing all the openings into the internal sections of the ship. This was made easier with the expertise of the Coast Guard engineers.

“As far as I know, this is the largest ship that has ever been fumigated with Vikane in Hawaii.”

Coast Guard crew members were tasked with cleaning up the dead roaches.

“They were totally happy with the results,” Mateo says. “I took pictures of the dead roaches to show the lieutenant in charge of the project. Letting him see the results made him feel good about the decision to fumigate.”



The Coast Guard was pleased with the final results of the fumigation job.

Drywood termites: fumigate or spot treat?

When it comes to recommending a home fumigation or a spot treatment, honesty is the best policy, says Tom Wisdo, president and entomologist for Impact Pest Elimination in Tampa, Florida. The 40-year pest control industry veteran's specialty is drywood termite inspections. “We’re the noted, honest experts on drywood termites,” he explains. “We get an enormous amount of calls from people who just want to get an honest answer.”

That means that, even at age 66, Wisdo still does up to three drywood termite inspections per day. He knows what to look for and how to talk to customers. His company offers spot or localized treatments for drywood termites, and they contract out fumigation jobs. For a drywood termite inspection, Wisdo looks for the following when making a recommendation to fumigate:



Tom Wisdo

1. Has a swarm occurred? Swarming is key, he says. “Drywoods are going to be a nuisance before they’re a threat.”
2. The number of areas with signs of drywood termites. “We look for the patterns of how termites are appearing in the house, and if they’re in multiple areas,” Wisdo says. “If there is minimal evidence of termites and it’s only on one side of the house, we’d probably recommend a spot treatment. But if it’s in the hardwood floors or all the windows, we’re seeing a pattern in similar places of construction, that’s what we look for in recommending a fumigation.”
3. How old is the house? “If it’s a real old house, chances are it’s been fumigated before, so you may be looking at old termite evidence,” Wisdo explains. “The age of the house tells you that the chance of a termite history is greater with an older house.”
4. What are the customer’s concerns? Is this a real estate transaction or is this person going to live in the home long term? “We rarely recommend localized treatments in real estate transactions,” says Wisdo.

“We don’t do the fear thing,” he says. “We sometimes spot-treat because that will help homeowners make a fumigation decision later. Once in a while, you’ll get a house where a spot treatment actually works because the house is new and the termites are only on an outside area, and you’ll never hear from that customer again. But that’s rare. “Obviously, localized treatment is not a surefire way of getting rid of drywood termites,” Wisdo continues. “Primarily, if the house has never had a history of drywood termites and now it’s to the point where they’re swarming, we tell people they need to really think about fumigation.”

Terminix makes circus workers' home bed bug-free

Russell Barnes has been fumigating in North Carolina for almost 40 years, but one recent job proved to be more tricky than most. It involved bed bugs that invaded a motor home and pickup truck used by traveling circus workers.



Terminix Service's fumigation team includes (from left) Jeff Haney, Mark Ledford, Rick Harris and Russell Barnes.

Barnes, a regional manager for Terminix Services in western

North Carolina, put his years of experience to the test to treat these two vehicles. The coordinator of the circus had purchased several chemicals online and tried to eliminate the bed bugs himself without success.

"All that did was drive the bed bugs inside the walls," Barnes says. "They'd come out at night and bite everyone. After we fumigated, we saw 30 or 40 dead bed bugs on the floor, so it was a pretty significant infestation."

Fumigation was the only way to eliminate the bed bugs, Barnes says.

"The customer wanted an instant kill," he explains. "They didn't want to continue to travel and keep getting bit. We have heat and freezing instruments, but that wouldn't work because the bed bugs were inside the walls. Besides, you have to be so careful using a heat treatment because if you have anything with a wood veneer or Formica countertops, if it gets too hot, the glue will let go."

Barnes' team members completed the fumigation in the gravel parking lot of Terminix in Asheville. They parked the two vehicles hood to hood, opened all compartments in the vehicles (including any freshwater tanks on the motor home), then tented them together. Always cautious about food during fumigation, Barnes says that the crew pulled out all food from the motor home.

"We had to dig up the gravel," he explains, "until you get to a flat surface, then wet it almost to the point of mud so you can put the tent on and use sand snakes to hold it to the ground. Fumigant will not penetrate water, so wetting the ground seals at the bottom. I had check lines in the truck and in the motor home and used a fumiscope to tell how much gas we were using."

Barnes says his customer didn't have any problems with bed bugs after the fumigation. He was so grateful, he invited Barnes and his Terminix crew to enjoy the circus for free.

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and participated in fumigation school," he continues. "We decided that this was feasible and could be profitable for our business, so we bought the equipment and got licensed by the state. Now, we've done about 20 fumigation jobs."

Richardson had a positive experience at the fumigation school and still is using the contacts he made while at the school. "We still rely on the guys we met in Florida to help get this off the ground," he says. "They're incredibly receptive and helpful."

Earlier this year, McCarthy Pest Control decided to reach out to local real estate agents to educate them on this service. "We've done it with great success," says Richardson. "We're actually getting realtors calling us and asking us to come to them and do presentations."

Brown recluse spiders are a big problem in Missouri, says Richardson. "We figure they're in about 30 percent of homes here," he says. As a result, McCarthy Pest Control plans to expand their fumigation offering this year and are confident the need for fumigation will increase in Missouri.

"People hate these spiders so much, we think there's going to be a market for it," he says. "We had a customer who had brown recluse spiders, and we approached that customer about fumigation, and at first they said no, but the more spiders they saw, then they said, 'OK, let's do this.'"

"We're really enjoying knowing that we're helping homeowners," Richardson adds. The one thing we didn't expect when we started this up is the most important thing — the reaction from homeowners when they're spider-free. They've written us letters for how happy they are and grateful to us for giving them back the home they love. We've been quite moved by that, so that spurs us on."