

# FUMIGATION TENTING FOR PESTS

## How to protect yourself

**If you are having your home or other property tented and fumigated for termites or other pests, you can take steps to reduce your chances of coming into contact with the harmful chemicals used during fumigation.**

Between 2003 and 2017, **11 people died after going inside fumigation tents** in California.

**NEVER GO INSIDE A FUMIGATION TENT!**

Most of the fumigation illness complaints involve **people exposed after the house or structure had been cleared for re-entry.**

*Fumigation tent on a church*



Every year, thousands of homes are fumigated for termites or other pests in California. Structural fumigation, also called “tenting” or “whole house fumigation,” is done by Structural Pest Control Operators (SPCOs). A toxic gas called sulfuryl fluoride is used to control bed bugs, termites, and other structure-infesting pests. This chemical has no smell, but can irritate your nose, eyes, throat, and lungs. **At high enough levels, it can cause nausea, vomiting, seizures, or even death.** In addition to sulfuryl fluoride, another toxic chemical, chloropicrin, is used as a “warning” agent. Chloropicrin can cause burning in the eyes, nose, throat, and lungs, which “warns” you that a harmful chemical is present.

After fumigation, the SPCO takes measurements in the home to check that the toxic chemicals are below the required levels before allowing people to re-enter their homes. However, sulfuryl fluoride can get trapped in empty spaces like wall sockets, crawl spaces, cabinets, and spaces in air mattresses and other household items. This can expose people to harmful chemicals even after the SPCO has certified a building to be safe. **You can follow the steps below to protect yourself from exposure to harmful fumigation chemicals.**



### Summary of Exposures and Illnesses

- 59 illnesses reported to the CA Department of Pesticide Regulation (2003-2014)
  - 86 people affected
  - 7 deaths due to people entering tents during fumigation
- 1291 calls to Poison Control (2010-2016)
  - 65% had health effects
  - 30% involved children aged 0-19

*Fumigation tent on a house*

For more information about sulfuryl fluoride fumigation and the summary box above:  
**National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI)** [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6603922/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6603922/)

## STEPS TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM FUMIGATION CHEMICALS

### Before fumigation:

- Contact your County Agricultural Commissioner's (CAC) Office and request that the county inspector be present to monitor the clearance process, which happens after the fumigation. You can find the contact information for your CAC at **California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA)** [www.cdfa.ca.gov/exec/county/documents/countycommissionersealercontactinfo.pdf](http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/exec/county/documents/countycommissionersealercontactinfo.pdf). You can also contact the CAC Office with any concerns about the Structural Pest Control Operators' (SPCO's) history.
- Ask the SPCO to provide records showing that the instruments used in the clearance process are working properly. This is called "calibration" and should be done yearly.
- Check this website to see if the Structural Pest Control Operators (SPCOs) in your area have any administrative civil penalties: any administrative civil penalties: **California Department of Pesticide Regulations (CDPR)** [www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/enforce/admnacts/cvlpnlty.htm](http://www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/enforce/admnacts/cvlpnlty.htm). This shows all the fines that SPCOs have paid for violations in the last two years and can help you identify areas of concern to discuss with a SPCO before fumigation.
  - You can find explanations of the code violations at **CDPR**: [www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/enforce/admnacts/citsec.pdf](http://www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/enforce/admnacts/citsec.pdf).
- **As an additional precaution, consider removing your mattress and bedding from your home before fumigation.** This is because we do not know how sulfuryl fluoride may get trapped in and released from some materials, like memory foam, that are used in mattresses and other furniture.



### After fumigation and clearance:

- **Allow extra time for airing out your home, with windows open, before moving back in.** Sulfuryl fluoride has been measured in homes up to 48 hours after clearance.
- **Ask the SPCO for documentation that shows exactly where and how many measurements were taken in your home during the clearance process (exact location, height, and levels measured).** Measurements should be taken in empty spaces like cupboards, drawers, closets, and other enclosed places where sulfuryl fluoride could still be present. Keep this documentation for your records.
- **If you smell any odor after returning home, leave immediately** and contact your CAC Office. You can also contact the SPCO and request additional testing for sulfuryl fluoride and chloropicrin (the warning agent) before moving back in.
- **If you or anyone in your family has any health symptoms after returning home, including coughing, burning throat or eyes, respiratory irritation, or nausea after returning home, see your health care provider as soon as possible.** They can file a pesticide illness report with the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (CDPR), which has its own follow-up process.