By Paul Bello, ACE, BCE | *PMP* Contributor

Work on your obliques

While today's light-emitting diode (LED) flashlights seem easy enough to use, there are some lighting techniques pest management professionals (PMPs) can harness with their flashlights to improve their wood-destroying organism (WDO) inspection results. Forensic investigators have been using lighting techniques to enhance their work for decades. It's time for our industry to start doing the same.

The technique with which most of us probably are familiar is **direct reflective lighting**. With this method, light is directed toward the subject. This usually will minimize shadows — but at the risk of hiding detail. You may find that the light is too bright for your inspection. **Bounce** and **diffused lighting** are useful techniques when photographing insects and other specimens where direct lighting would create too much contrast to view the specimen in proper detail. Both serve to soften the light, reduce excessive light and eliminate glare.

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Under "normal" lighting, this is how the damaged surface appears.

Of most interest and beneficial use to PMPs are the **45°** and **oblique lighting** techniques. Setting the light source at these varied angles cast shadows on the lighted surface, which may allow PMPs to better view and detect visible telltale signs of WDO and/or pest activity. In this example of oblique lighting, the flashlight illuminates where subterranean termites have damaged or consumed the paper of the drywall beneath the painted surface.

Oblique lighting may be more useful than 45° lighting for WDO inspections. Oblique lighting is when the light source is placed at a low angle, close to the surface being observed. Doing so casts long shadows on the viewed surface, so that imperfections become easily seen.

When the light source is at a low angle, PMPs can readily observe surface imperfections; depressions that may be from termite damage; rodent gnaw marks; and other observable, telltale signs of pest activity.

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