

Choosing a Pest Control Company

What you need to know...



IF YOU HAVE a pest control problem that you do not want to handle on your own, you may decide to turn to a professional applicator. How can you be sure that the pest control company you hire will do a good job? Before you choose a company, get answers to these questions:

1 Is the company licensed? Most state or local agencies issue state pest control licenses. Make sure the pest control operator's license is **current** if one is required in your state. Also, ask if the company's **employees are bonded**, meaning that the company reimburses you for any loss or damage caused by the employee.

You may want to contact your state pesticide agency to find out about its pesticide certification and training programs and to ask whether periodic recertification is required for pest control operators. In addition, possession of a city license—where they are issued—is one more assurance that the company you are dealing with is reputable and responsible.

2 Is the company willing and able to discuss the treatment proposed for your home? Selecting a pest control service is just as important as selecting other professional services. Look for the same high degree of competence you would expect from a doctor or lawyer. Any company, including those advertising themselves as “green,” should inspect your premises and outline a recommended control program, including the following:

- Pests to be controlled.
- Extent of the problem.
- Active ingredient(s) in the pesticide chosen.



- Potential adverse health effects and typical symptoms of poisoning associated with the active ingredient.
- Form of the pesticide and application techniques.
- Nonchemical alternatives available.
- Special instructions to reduce your exposure to the pesticide (such as vacating the house, emptying the cupboards, and removing pets).
- Steps to take to minimize your pest problems in the future.

3 Does the company have a good track record?

Don't rely on the company salesperson to answer this question. Research the answer yourself. Ask neighbors and friends if they have ever dealt with the company. Were they satisfied with the service they received? Call your state or local pesticide regulatory agency or local consumer office and find out if they have received complaints about the company.

4 Does the company have appropriate insurance? Can the salesperson show proof on paper that the company is insured?

Most contractors carry general liability insurance, including insurance for sudden and accidental pollution. Their insurance gives you a certain degree of protection should an accident occur while pesticides are being applied in your home. Contractors may also carry workmen's compensation insurance, which can help protect you should one of their employees be injured while working in or around your apartment or house. Although most states do not require pest control companies to buy insurance, you should **think twice** before hiring a company that is not insured.

5 Does the company guarantee its work?

You should be skeptical about a company that does not guarantee its work. In addition, be sure to find out what you must do to keep your part of the bargain. For example, in the case of termite control treatments, the company's guarantee may become invalid if you make structural alterations to your home without giving prior notice to the pest control company.

6 Is the company affiliated with a professional pest control association?

Professional associations—national, state, or local—keep members informed of new developments in pest control methods, safety, training, research, and regulations. Members agree to honor a code of ethics. The fact that a company, small or large, chooses to join a professional association signals its concern for quality.

You and the company of your choice should develop the contract together. Your safety concerns should be noted and reflected in the choice of pesticides to be used. These concerns may include allergies, sensitivities, age of occupants (infants or elderly), resident pets, and treatment near wildlife and fish. Wise consumers get bids from two or three companies and look at value more than price. What appears to be a bargain may warrant a second look.

If you hire a pest control firm to do the job, ask the company to use the least toxic chemical method available that will do the job. Ask to see the label or Material Safety Data Sheet, which will show precautionary warnings. Hiring a company to take care of your pest problem does not mean your job is over. You must evaluate the results. If you believe something has gone wrong with the pesticide application, contact the company and/or your state pesticide agency. Be a responsible, wise consumer and keep asking questions until your pests are under control.