

## HOME AND GARDEN COLUMN

# HOW TO BUY PEST CONTROL SERVICE

With hundreds of pesticide companies in Central Florida, it can be very difficult choosing the right one. For some, this can be an outright overwhelming decision. It is very important when paying for a pesticide service to feel that we have received the most skilled efforts and control for our money. Hopefully, with a few tips, I can help make your decision less traumatic.

Who is a pest control company? There are three main people that you should know, the certified operator, the salesperson, and the spray technician. The certified operator is the real professional in the company who trains and supervises the technicians. They are the ones who are licensed. They must pass a rigid examination and meet many qualifications to demonstrate their competence. Certification is available in four categories: general household pest control, termites or other wood-destroying organisms, lawn and ornamental pest control, and fumigation. Companies which have operators certified in all 4 categories may offer total pest control services; otherwise they may offer only the services for which they have a certified operator.

The salesperson is usually your first contact with the company. They inspect premises, determine the extent of the problem, and give estimates for pest control work to be performed. Mostly this is a free service, but always remember to shop around, making sure that the diagnosis of the problem is correct and the estimate is reasonable.

The service technician is the individual who does the actual pest control work. The quality of the control of pests depends to a large degree on the training the technician has received and the professionalism of the technician on the job.

When shopping for pest control service, the following steps should be taken:

1. Shop around for the best service at a reasonable price. Contact the small companies as well as the large companies. Sometimes there's better service with the family-owned companies.
2. If you do not know how to recognize insect infestation or damage, ask the salesman to show it to you. They must show you evidence of pest damage.
3. Have the salesperson certify in writing that the premise is infested with a specific pest and a treatment is required.
4. You may confirm the salesperson's diagnosis by sending evidence of the pest or damage to the Cooperative Extension Service office. An unbiased opinion may insure the proper treatment.
5. Get opinions from two or more pest control firms before deciding on expensive and extensive treatments.
6. Read the proposed contracts carefully so you know exactly what the company will do and guarantee. Ask the salesperson to interpret parts that you do not understand.
7. Check with the Better Business Bureau to be certain the company has not received any complaints on their service.

By following these procedures you are more likely to buy the services you need and feel more confident doing so. Always remember, selling unnecessary pest control services is prohibited by the pest control laws. Pest control firms cannot tell you that a pest is infesting your property or structure, or that a specific treatment for pest control is required, unless supporting evidence of an infestation exists. However, you still should be cautious when buying pest control services.

It is also against the law for a pest control firm to perform pest control in a negligent manner. They cannot

make false claims, misrepresent the effects of materials or methods, or fail to use methods or materials suitable for the pest control needed. Fraudulent or misleading advertising is also against the law.

If a pest control company is found violating the law, it may have its license suspended or revoked if the claims are proven to be true. If you have a pest control complaint regarding any negligence contact the nearest Entomologist-Inspector with the Florida Division of Agricultural and Consumer Services.

For more information on buying pest control service, including specifics on contracts for wood-destroying organisms, contact the Osceola County Master Gardeners at (321) 697-3000. They are available to take your gardening questions on Mondays to Fridays from 10am to 2pm.

Save water and money! Collect rainwater to use for irrigation and other uses in a rain barrel. A "make and take" rain barrel class is scheduled from May 30th. Fee is \$20 for materials. Please call for more information.

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