HOME AND GARDEN COLUMN

PESTICIDE APPLICATOR LICENSE REQUIRED

Are your landscape professionals licensed? Individuals applying chemicals to the landscape (including over-the-counter pesticides), who do not personally own the property, must have a pesticide applicator license.

According to the Florida Pesticide Law, Chapter 482 F.S., commercial landscapers must have a Limited Commercial Landscape Maintenance license in order to legally use least toxic products with caution labels. This includes products such as soaps and oils, Bacillus thurengiensis (such as Dipel) to control caterpillars, and herbicides. If your lawn care company uses Roundup or other weed killers to edge flowerbeds and kill weeds around trees, the person spraying must have a license. Chemicals may only be used on ornamental plant beds. The license does not allow the use of pesticides on lawns. This includes "weed & feed" products. The "weed" in "weed & feed" is a pesticide. Fertilizers, however, can be applied without a license. Each person spraying pesticides needs to have a license, unless the company has a certified pest control operator license.

A person with a certified pest control operator’s license (PCO) can apply chemicals to landscapes, including lawns. This license requires much more vigorous training and testing than the Limited Commercial Landscape Maintenance license. The owner of the company, who has the PCO license, can supervise an unlimited number of employees. Although not every individual using chemicals needs to be licensed under a PCO, they are required to have an identification card issued by the Florida Department of Agriculture’s Bureau of Entomology.

In order to obtain any pesticide license, the person must take classes, an exam, and show proof of insurance. Unlicensed pest control operators should never be used. According to the Florida Bureau of Entomology and Pest Control, most unlicensed people/companies do not have insurance. If misuses of pesticides occur, cleaning up the contaminated area can be very expensive and not worth the couple of dollars you saved by using an unlicensed company.

Some unlicensed pest control operators require that a customer pay in advance for a year of service. There are many complaints to the Bureau of Entomology and Pest Control that the person then disappears with their money. Be suspicious if any person asks you to make your check out to "cash" or to them personally. Don't participate in "under the table payments" to avoid taxes or any other reason. It is illegal.

The Bureau of Entomology and Pest Control requires that all sales and service vehicles used for pest control be permanently marked on both sides of the vehicle with the licensee's business name as it was registered. Always check to see if a vehicle is marked.

Unfortunately for the customer, employees of pest control companies have been reported for stealing from their company and not turning the money collected in. Check your statements closely and call the company every now and then to make sure you are still on their customer list. Moonlighting by pest control identification cardholders (employees) is prohibited by law.

The state issues a numbered pest control business license to all active pest control companies (PCO’s) annually. You could request the company to supply you with a copy of this document. Business license numbers will begin with a pre-fix of "JB". A licensed landscaper with the Limited Commercial Landscape Maintenance license, who does not operate a pest control business, is required to show you their certification license by request. Licenses are only valid for one year. Applicators must take classes to renew
their license annually. Make sure you always check the expiration date of the license.

In summary, anyone using chemicals beyond their own property, even those sold over the counter (excluding fertilizers), must be licensed. Limited Commercial Landscape Maintenance licensees cannot apply pesticides to lawns and everyone using chemicals must be licensed within the company. A Pest Control Operator can use pesticides on lawns and can oversee an unlimited number of employees, who must carry an identification card issued by the Bureau of Entomology and Pest Control.

To verify that the company/person is licensed visit www.safepesticideuse.com or call the Bureau of Entomology and Pest Control directly at (850) 921-4177, Monday thru Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (except for holidays). You can also find if a company has been fined for the misuse of pesticides or make a complaint about a company at www.floridatermitehelp.org.

For further information on what you should look for in a lawn service company, attend the "Landscape Services: Getting the most for your money" seminar. It will be held on September 9th at 2pm in the Extension Services building at Osceola Heritage Park and on September 30th at 10 am in the St. Cloud Library. Registration is required. Please call (321) 697-3000 for more information.

Interested in creating your own water gardening? A Water Gardening seminar will be held on September 11th at 1 PM in the Poinciana Library and on September 17th at 10 AM in the Extension Services building at Osceola Heritage Park. Please call to register.

Jennifer Welshans
Horticulture Agent
Osceola County Extension Service
1921 Kissimmee Valley Lane
Kissimmee, FL 34744
321-697-3000
jwel2@osceola.org
osceola.ifas.ufl.edu
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