



Entomology Insect Information Series

Providing Leadership in Environmental Entomology

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Choosing A Professional Pest Control Company

There are many sprays, dusts and bait products on the market for homeowners to use to control pests. However, it is not always possible for homeowners to inspect and treat their own house without the proper equipment, training and knowledge of pest behavior and nesting habits. In many cases, a professional pest control operator can solve a pest problem more safely and effectively than a homeowner. Today, most professionals use a wide variety of baits, targeted sprays, dusts and nonchemical measures to control household and structural pests. This fact sheet will help you decide if you need a pest control operator and how to select the right professional for your situation.

Do I need a pest control operator? You may need the services of a professional to solve your pest problem if you have one of the following situations:

- Termites. It is rare that a homeowner can adequately and safely treat termite infestations.
- The pests are potentially dangerous, like nesting wasps or brown recluse spiders.
- You don't know what the pests are, where they are nesting or how they are entering your home.
- The pest infestation is in a sensitive area to treat such as around food areas, electrical equipment, wells or in rooms where infants, children or elderly spend a lot of time.
- The pests are in a difficult area to treat such roofs, attics, chimneys or crawlspaces.
- You are unsure or worried about your ability to use insecticides properly.

What should I consider when contracting with a pest control professional? If you decide that using a pest control operator is the right choice for you, get bids from two or three firms before contracting with

one. Most companies will inspect your home free. Ask for recent, local references and check with neighbors or friends about companies they may have used. Be wary of prices that seem "out of line," especially those that are too low. A low price may mean low quality.

The professional you hire should identify your pest problem and areas of infestation. They should have a specific program or plan for control. For termites, the pest control operator should make a map of your house highlighting areas where damage has been found and any structural or drainage problems. They should also note any areas that were not accessible for inspection.

Other important things to consider include:

- Is the company licensed and certified in South Carolina? They must be to do work at your home.
- Do they belong to professional associations such as the National Pest Control Association or the South Carolina Pest Control Association? This can be an indication of a company's dedication to good service.
- Do they have specialized training, especially in treating termites? For example, have they received training at one of the termite technician schools offered by Clemson University?
- What is their specialty? For example, do they have expertise in controlling your specific pest problem?
- What treatment options do they offer? Do they use chemicals and nonchemical control methods? Do they monitor for pest problems, treating only when necessary?
- What is their warranty? In particular with termites, some firms limit their liability for damage done to your home by termites after treatment. Others exclude damage done by specific termites such as the Formosan subterranean termite.
- Have they had regulatory actions taken against them due to violations? You can find out by calling

the Department of Pesticide Regulation at (864) 646-2150.

- Don't be afraid to ask questions about costs.
- Reach an understanding before any work is started. Find out what the pest is, how the problem will be treated, how long the period of treatment will be and what results can be expected. Know the need for reinspections or retreatments.

Your home is probably the most expensive purchase you will ever make. With a little time and knowledge, pest infestations and damage can be minimized or perhaps avoided entirely. The right pest control professional for you can do an excellent job, provide regular inspections and offer a warranty.

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