



## Selecting a Pest Control Company

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### Introduction

For many pests, a combination of simple preventative and curative control tactics can be implemented by homeowners to reduce or eliminate a pest population. However, some pest infestations may be too serious or extensive for the general population to solve on their own. In these situations, a pest control professional might be needed. If you need help, what can you do to be sure the pest control company you hire will do a good job? Seek answers to the following questions before hiring a company or signing a contract.

### Does the Company Have a Good Reputation?

Do not rely on the company salesperson to answer this question; research the answer yourself. Start by looking up the company online. Do they have positive reviews? Ask your neighbors and friends if they have experience with the company. Were they satisfied with the service they received? Contact the Better Business Bureau; the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS), Office of Consumer Affairs; or the VDACS Office of Pesticide Services to check if the company has received any complaints.

### Is the Company Licensed?

In Virginia, all pest control companies that use pesticides are required to carry a pesticide business license. All employees are required to be trained and certified as either registered technicians or commercial applicators. In addition, these applicators are required to be recertified every two years. The law requires that a certified commercial applicator be available to supervise the application of pesticides at your home. This means the supervisor must be in direct contact with the applicator, but he or she does not have to be on site. This is not the case with untrained applicators (registered technicians who have not completed

training). These individuals must be under the direct on-site supervision of a certified commercial applicator at all times during the application. Before signing a contract, ask the company manager and the applicator to show you these credentials. Review their pesticide business license and current pesticide applicator certificates. Licenses can be independently verified on the VDACS Office of Pesticide Services website.

### Does the Company Have Insurance?

Ask the salesperson or manager for documentation that confirms the company is properly insured. In Virginia, businesses that recommend or apply pesticides are required to maintain liability insurance. You should never hire a company that is not insured. As a safety net, make sure you are adequately insured.

### Is the Company Affiliated With a Professional Association?

Professional associations help member companies stay up-to-date on the latest information about pest control methods, safety, training, research, and regulation. Most associations also have a code of ethics that members agree to abide by. Companies that affiliate with professional associations show they are committed to the quality and professionalism of their work. Pest control operators (PCO's or exterminators) are often members of associations like the National Pest Management Association or the Virginia Pest Management Association. Lawn care companies often belong to national and regional associations such as the National Association of Landscape Professionals and the Virginia Turfgrass Council. The Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association is also affiliated with many landscape firms who apply pesticides for hire in Virginia.

## Does the Company Stand Behind Its Work?

Reconsider your options before hiring a company unwilling to offer some sort of assurance regarding the quality and outcome of their service. You should also find out what conditions must be met in order to keep your part of the bargain. For example, in the case of termite control treatments, a guarantee could be invalidated if you make structural changes to the treated building without notifying the pest control company. In addition, many companies require an annual inspection or maintenance contract to uphold their guarantee. Read the fine print in your contract, and ask questions.

## Is the Company Willing and Able to Discuss the Proposed Treatment?

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 any professional. The company should inspect your premises and outline a recommended control program. The program should identify

- Which pests are to be controlled.
- The extent of the infestation.
- Which pesticide formulations will be used in or around your home and why.
- Any environmental concerns related to the products being used.
- Methods that will be used in the application.
- Alternatives that could be used instead, including alternatives to pesticides like mechanical, physical, cultural, or biological controls.
- Special instructions you should follow to reduce your exposure to the treatment (e.g., vacating the home, emptying cupboards, removing pets, when you can re-enter a treated area).
- Things you can do to minimize pest problems in the future.

## Does the Company Address Your Safety In the Proposed Contract?

Contracts should be developed jointly with the customer. Any safety concerns should be noted and reflected in the choice of any pesticides used. These

concerns should include the health of occupants (including allergies), the age of occupants (infants and elderly), or pets. Make sure you understand all of the details before signing the contract, especially those concerning the risks of using pesticides. Pesticide risk is related to the toxicity of the product(s) (how poisonous it is) and the potential for exposure (how much you get in or on your body). Just because a pesticide is being used does not mean you are at great risk, as long as your exposure to the chemical is minimized. Make sure you know what is being done to minimize risk before you commit to the treatment. If you need details on the pesticides being used, ask your contractor to review the product labeling with you. If the contractor refuses, look elsewhere for service.

## Conclusion and Resources

Before making a final decision, get two or three estimates from prospective companies. Read each estimate thoroughly. Focus on value, not price. What appears to be a bargain may merit a second look. Do not always settle on the lowest bid; look for quality. Also, remember that good cooperation is needed between the consumer and the pest control company in order to adequately control the pest(s) and reduce pesticide risk. For additional information on selecting a pest control company, please refer to the following resources:

- Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Office of Pesticide Services, [vapesticidesafety.com/hiring\\_professional.shtml](http://vapesticidesafety.com/hiring_professional.shtml)
- National Pesticide Information Center, [npic.orst.edu/pest/selectpcu.html](http://npic.orst.edu/pest/selectpcu.html)



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