

Pest Control Info Guide



Everything You **MUST** Know
Before Hiring a
Pest Control Company!

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Introduction

Pest control is an inevitable part of owning a home. There are millions of invaders who would just love to share our homes with us. Unfortunately these uninvited guests can often spell trouble for us. Some household pests can spread diseases and cause other health problems. Some bite and sting people or destroy property. Some are just plain annoying. Whatever the reason for wanting to get rid of them, removing household pests can sometimes be easier said than done. For many people the services of a pest control company are essential.

Not all pest control companies are created equal. Some specialize in specific areas of pest control, while others can treat just about any problem. Some companies are nation-wide while others are locally owned. Some pest control companies require a yearly contract, while others will come out and do a single job for you. In order to make the right choice when it comes to deciding on a pest control company, you need to know what your specific problem is. If you are not sure of what types of pests are invading your home many pest control companies will do a free inspection. Pest control companies can help rid your home of: rats, mice, ants, bees, wasps, termites, pillbugs, spiders, millipedes, centipedes, stink bugs, lady bugs, cockroaches, fleas, ticks and much more.

Choosing a decent pest control company is very important. These people will be coming into your home and spraying chemicals, so you need to be sure they are both trustworthy and educated. You will also want to be sure you will receive the level of customer service you expect. Here is everything you need to know *before* you hire a pest control company.

Finding a Pest Control Company

It is usually pretty easy to determine if you need to hire a pest control company. Your home or office will be infested or inhabited by unwanted pests. Before you decide to hire a specific pest control company you need to know what type of services you will be requiring. Pest control companies vary from state to state. There are typically two categories of pest control companies- 'general household pest control' companies and more specialized 'termite control' companies. 'General household pest control' companies handle problems with fleas, ants, cockroaches, stink bugs, millipedes and other types of insects that occasionally invade your home. These types of insects and other pests are usually only a nuisance to homeowners. Sometimes these invaders can serve as a health risk as well. 'Termite control' companies deal specifically with termites, which can cause serious structural damage to a home. Many of the larger pest control companies will be able to perform both of services.

Once you have decided on what type of pest control services you require you can begin looking for a company to hire. You will want to make a list of potential companies. This list should have a minimum of 3 choices on it. 5 potential choices would be even better. The more potential companies that are on your list the better chance you have of finding the best option for your specific situation. There will be a few differences between individual pest control companies. One of these differences will be in techniques and methods they use to remove pests. The other difference will be the amount of customer service you will receive. Customer service is really a personal preference. There are many easy ways to find a potential pest control company, but the best resource for finding one that will deliver a high level of customer service is through referrals.

Referrals from friends, family, co-workers, acquaintances or anyone else whose opinion you can trust is your best option for locating a pest control company that will do a good job. Odds are that someone you know has used a specific pest control company in the past. By interviewing these trusted sources you are more likely to find out what you want to know about a potential company before you hire them. Here are some questions to ask a trusted source about a potential pest control company:

1. How many times have you used this specific pest control company?
2. Have you been consistently happy with their work?
3. What kind of pest problem did you use them for? Did they do a good job of getting rid of your pest problem?
4. Did you find the company to be reasonably priced?
5. How satisfied were you with the company's level of customer service?
6. Would you recommend this specific pest control company to me for my pest problem?

The answers to these questions will give you an insight into the company and the customer service they have offered to others in the past. It is a good idea to ask a trusted source who has experienced a pest control problem similar to yours, although a pest control company with a good reputation is likely to do just as good a job removing your fleas as they did your friend's mice.

If you do not know of anyone who has used a pest control company before, or you have been getting bad recommendations from your sources, then it is time to go out and find a pest control company on your own. Finding a pest control company is easy with today's online and print advertising. Here are some other ways to locate potential pest control companies for your list:

1. Online searches. If you type in 'pest control' or 'exterminator' into a major online search engine such as Google and then type in your zip code you will find a number of different companies that operate in your area. Internet searches are very helpful because they give you a chance to review the company's website and find out some information about them before you give them a call.

2. Pest Control Associations. There are several professional pest control associations that can point you towards a local company. A good one is the National Pest Management Association or NPMA. It has a zip code search tool on its website. The NPMA can be found at: www.pestworld.org.
3. Your local Better Business Bureau. The Better Business Bureau will have a list of pest control companies that operate in your community. It will also have information about specific companies, including complaints or violations lodged against them. The Better Business Bureau website can be found at: www.BBB.org.
4. Traditional Advertising. Advertising is another easy way to locate potential pest control companies. This is the typical print, radio or TV forms of advertising we tend to see every day. This also includes the Yellow Pages. These types of advertising will help you locate potential companies and you can generally tell how well a company is doing by their advertising. You will be performing additional research before you decide to hire a specific company, so it is okay if you want to find potential companies through traditional advertising.

Once you have a list of *at least* 3 and preferably more potential companies you are ready to begin the research and interviewing process.

Do You Need a Pest Control Company?

Do you really need to hire a professional pest control company, or can you deal with your pest problem on your own? This is a question that most people will ask themselves when they discover that they have a pest problem. Odds are that hiring a pest control company is going to be more expensive than taking care of the problem yourself. There are many professional strength pest control products available for over the counter purchase and many are the exact same products that will be used by a pest control company. However, depending on how bad your infestation is, what kinds of pests you are dealing with and what types of methods need to be used to get rid of the problem, you may have to hire a company. The choice is really up to you. You may wish to hire a company if:

1. The infestation is really bad or covers a very large area of your home.
2. You have already tried to get rid of the pests but have been unsuccessful.
3. You have termites. (It is not a good idea for you to attempt to get rid of termites on your own.)
4. You do know what kinds of pests you have. (Some pests are easier to identify than others.)
5. When the pest is potentially dangerous or poses a health risk to you.

Pest control companies may also have more resources and more knowledge than you do. Here are some potential advantages of using a pest control company:

- ⌚ Expertise in specific types of pests and what methods work the best to eradicate them.
- ⌚ Access to professional-grade chemicals and pesticides that may only be available to licensed exterminators. Access to specific pest control equipment. Access to multiple methods to kill multiple types of pests.
- ⌚ Education of different pest removal techniques.
- ⌚ Companies often have the ability to effectively manage the pest population.

Deciding whether to control the problem yourself or hire a professional pest control company will depend on your specific situation. You can always attempt to get rid of the problem yourself and then call in the experts if you are unsuccessful. It may end up being more cost effective for you to hire a professional to help prevent problems from occurring in the first place. This could be true if you live in an area that makes you more susceptible to certain types of pest problems. Hiring a professional may also give you more peace of mind.

Types of Pest Control

There are several different types of pest control. Understanding the differences between the different types of pest control can help you decide which company you want to hire and what types of services you will require. Here is some information regarding the different types of pest control typically offered by pest control companies:

- ⌚ Chemical pest control uses chemicals and pesticides to kill pests or prevent them from reproducing. Chemical pest control can vary widely in safety and effectiveness. Many of these chemicals require training and special licenses to use. Chemicals used to eliminate pests can be applied in many ways. They can be sprayed directly on the source. They can also be used to treat an entire area by releasing them through a fogging or misting application. This is usually referred to as fumigation. Chemicals will also vary in potential risks to the health of humans, pets, wildlife and plants.
- ⌚ Biological pest control uses natural methods to remove pests or prevent them from breeding. The point of using biological pest control methods is to eliminate the pest without harming the environment. Sometimes this procedure uses naturally produced pest killers or repellents. In some cases a pest species can be controlled by introducing a natural predator into the environment. Other times it means altering the pest's environment to make it less enticing to the pest. Biological pest control can also mean physically removing the pest from the location.

Some pest control companies will give you a choice of what type of products they will use to remove your pests. Other companies will use their own methods. If you are worried about the use of chemicals around you, your home or your family, then you might have to look up a pest control company that specializes in biological and non-chemical pest control procedures. The important thing to remember that you have to be 100% aware of what methods and techniques a pest control company is going to use *before* you sign a contract with them. Pest control companies also tend to offer monthly, quarterly or yearly pest control options. You may also be able to fix your problem in a single 'job'. Sometimes you will want to have a pest control company come only when a pest problem develops. These are also things you need to know about in advance so

that you can hire the right company for the job. The prices for these types of services will also differ.

Interviewing a Pest Control Company

Now that you understand what types of pest control services you require and have created a list of potential companies to hire, you are now ready to set up an interview with each one. Interviewing a potential company *before* you hire them will go a long way towards helping you choose the right company for the job. It will also help you ensure that you are hiring someone with the right training, expertise and licenses for the specific task you need done. The interview process also allows to you gauge the company's customer service levels and professionalism before you allow them into your home. This is an absolutely essential part of choosing the right pest control company for the job. Most pest control companies will not mind spending a few minutes to answer your questions. Most will do a walk-through and offer advice. Be wary of any pest control company that wants you to sign a contract before they answer your questions or any company who shrinks away from answering your questions.

Here are some research steps you can take before you interview potential companies to gather more information:

- ⌚ Determine if each specific pest control company is licensed in your state. You can contact your state's local office of consumer affairs or licensing bureau to find out. Most states require that a pest control company be licensed.
- ⌚ Call your local Chamber of Commerce or Better Business Bureau and find out if the company has had any complaints or violations filed against them.
- ⌚ You can also check out some consumer review or professional recommendation websites to find out what other customers are saying about the company's reputation. A good example of a consumer review website is Angie's List, which is available at www.angieslist.com.

- 🕒 You can find out information regarding certain types of pesticides or other chemicals by visiting the EPA's resources for pest management page. This will help you understand the risks and rewards of using chemicals for pest removal.

Once you have performed a little background research on your potential choices you can call and set up an interview. Here is a list of questions to ask a potential pest control company during the interview process:

1. How long have you been in business? What types of pest control services do you provide?
2. Does your company offer services based on a monthly, quarterly or yearly schedule? How are service calls handled? Do you require scheduled calls or do you offer services on an as-needed basis? Do unscheduled calls cost extra?
3. Do you have references? Is your company affiliated with any professional pest control associations?
4. Are you licensed? Can you show me proof? Is there a Certified Operator in charge?
5. Are the company's employees bonded and insured? Who would be responsible to damage to my home or if an accident occurs on my property?
6. Do your employees require any certification or training programs to be employed by you? Do you perform background checks on your employees?
7. Does your company offer any additional services such as repairing window screens or patching holes in the walls? Does your company have a carpentry unit?
8. Do you offer both internal and external pest treatment techniques?
9. How does your company handle disputes, complaints or problems? What satisfaction guarantees does your company offer?
10. How does your pricing structure work? Do you have a sample contract for me to review?
11. How many people will be working on my home at any given time? Will it be the same operators or different operators? Will there be a manager or foreman on-site in case there are any problems?

The next step is to walk through your home with a representative from the potential pest control company. This will give the pest control operator a chance to look through your home and determine what types of service you require. It is also a chance for you to ask specific questions and gather more information about the company. Here are some things to look for when performing a walk-through:

1. How does the pest control agent appear? Are they clean and neat in appearance? Did they show up on time?
2. Has the agent answered your questions? Are they polite and informative?
3. Is the agent dressed in a uniform? How does their company vehicle appear?

Here are questions you can ask the pest control company agent in order to find out what pest control procedures they intend to use in your home:

1. What specific types of pests will you be working to control?
2. What specific chemicals or pesticides will you be using in my home? What is the active ingredient of your chemical or pesticide product? Are there any safety concerns I should know about? Are there any potential adverse health effects associated with your chemicals?
3. What types of techniques will you be using to apply pesticides or chemicals? Do you offer environmentally-friendly or biological pest control options?

4. What is the extent of my pest problem? How long do you expect for it to take to eliminate the problem?

5. Are there any special instructions I need to be aware of? How can I reduce my exposure to any potential harmful agents? What about kids, pets and house plants? How about wildlife and waterways? Will they be affected by your chemical products? Can I review your Material Safety Data Sheet?

6. What steps can I take to minimize pest problems in the future?

Try to get a feel for the agent and the company during their initial visit to your home. If you decide to hire this company their agents will be entering your home, so you want to feel as though you can trust them. You also want to work with a company that is honest and fair. The initial walk-through is a great time to ask any questions you may have about the types of techniques and chemicals the company uses. If you are worried about the use of chemicals around your home or family, or if you are interested in more eco-friendly pest control practices, now is the time to ask. Take your time and choose a company that you feel you can trust. If the agent cannot answer your questions or doesn't answer them to your satisfaction then choose someone else.

Once you have interviewed your list of potential candidates and have a good idea of the types of service they can offer you can decide which company you want to use. Make sure all of your questions have been answered and that you are aware of how their system works. Once you have decided which pest control company you want to hire you can begin analyzing the contract. Choose a company that offers you a fair price. Price may not be the only factor and it may not be a good way to determine how good of a job the company will do for you, but it is certainly an important factor.

Potential Problems

Like any company that provides a service, there are things that can go wrong with hiring a pest control company. Your research and interview process will help eliminate some of these problems by ensuring that you hire a professional-grade company with an excellent record of customer service. There are some potential problems that could arise even if you have done all of the necessary research. Knowing in advance what could go wrong will help you be more prepared to deal with it. Here are some potential problems that could occur with a pest control company:

- ⌚ Property damage. Sometimes things can happen when other people are working around your home. This could be something simple like trampled flowers or something serious like damaging a load-bearing wall. Whether property damage occurs because of a mistake or if it happens because of careless behavior on the part of the pest control company, you need to be prepared to deal with it. This is where carefully reviewing the contract *before* you sign it comes in. Be sure you understand who will be responsible for any damage that may occur to your home. You should also be aware of how the company will require you to report such damage and if there is a set period of time in which you must report damage. It is also important to be aware of any guarantees the company offers and what may void such guarantees. You also need to know what types of insurance they have and if it will cover the employee while they are in your home.
- ⌚ Customer dissatisfaction. Sometimes a company claims to be able to get rid of your pest problem, but then the problem turns out to be much harder to fix. This is why you need to understand the company's policy on customer satisfaction. What provisions are listed in the contract about solving your pest problems and what can you do if the problem is not fixed properly? This also refers to how you would deal with missed appointments, late service personal or other problems relating to customer service.
- ⌚ Contract disputes. Sometimes the company will claim the job is done when you think it is not finished to your satisfaction. If this occurs you need to know how to

file a dispute and what the contract says about resolving disputes. Again, you also need to know what may void your guarantee.

The Contract

Once you have chosen a pest control company you are ready to review the contract that both of you will sign. **Never** allow a pest control company to begin working on your home until you have both reviewed and signed a contract. A contract is there to protect both the customer and the company. The contract should be clear and easy to understand. Review the contract carefully and ask questions if there is something you are not clear about. **Never** allow a company or agent to coerce you into signing a contract that you are not comfortable signing. Here are some things to look for when you are reviewing the pest control company's contract:

1. Be sure that the contract includes the name of the company, the length of time that the contract is valid and what specific services will be included under these terms.
2. Be sure that the contract clearly states the price you are going to pay and what services are offered for that price.
3. Look for possible exclusion clauses. These are things that will allow the company to cancel the contract or void the company's guarantee.
4. Look for the company's customer service guarantee. Be sure that you know what your options will be if you feel that the job was not done properly. Is there an arbitration clause or other way to settle disputes in the contract?
5. Be sure that you understand if you or the company can cancel the account and what penalties may be involved if you decide to cancel the account before the contract ends.
6. As with all contracts, be sure to read the small print. You don't want any surprises down the road.
7. The contract should include information about the company's insurance coverage. It should also include any omissions or errors that will affect the company's level of insurance or your ability to file a claim.

8. If you have requested any special treatments or terms you will want to be sure that they are also clearly listed in the contract.

Once you have carefully reviewed the contract and determined that it is complete, both you and the company should sign it. You should then receive a copy of the contract for your personal records. Keep this contract in a safe place.

Special Termite Control Contract Tips

If your home has a termite problem, then you will want to make sure that some other important things show up in the contract. In order for a pest control company to work on your termite problem the contract should include everything listed above, including insurance, payment and customer guarantee information. You also want to make sure that company performs a detailed inspection *before* they offer you a contract. For termite control, especially subterranean termite control, you want to ensure that the contract features:

- ⌚ The location of the termite infestation and the probable points of entry.
- ⌚ Who will assume liability for structural damage caused by the termites. Sometimes a pest control company will not assume liability for any damage caused by termites, even after the structure has been treated.
- ⌚ Warranty and customer service guarantees. You want to be sure you know who will be held responsible if the termites return.
- ⌚ 'Re-treatment clauses' are clauses that determine if the company will re-treat the house if termites reappear. The contract will also likely include a number of 'exclusion clauses' that will cover what actions you might take that will void the warranty or guarantee offered by the company.
- ⌚ Make sure the contract lists what types of techniques and services will be used to fix the problem. Contracts will often vary depending on the type of construction that will be treated.
- ⌚ Look for 'damage replacement' clauses in the contract as well. These are clauses that protect any damage to the home caused by termites while the home is under the care of the pest control company. You may also want to look for clauses that will determine who is responsible for damage caused to the structure during the treatment process.

- ⌚ Find out what will disqualify your home from the company's 'damage replacement' or 're-treatment' clauses. Often a company will consider a 'conductive condition' or any condition in your home that creates favorable conditions for termites as a disqualification from guarantees or other clauses.

- ⌚ Sometimes a company will require that the soil surrounding your home is removed before they will issue a 'damage replacement' or 're-treatment' clause in the contract. The type of material used to cover your home may also affect the contract.

- ⌚ The contract may have differences in terms when it comes to treating existing termite infestations and offering yearly re-inspection of the property.

- ⌚ Make sure you know how long the contract lasts and what the anniversary dates for re-inspection are. 'Lifetime' contracts typically last as long as you own the home, while 'treatment with no extension' contracts are usually given to homes with severe 'conductive condition' problems. Be sure you know what type of contract you have and how long it lasts.

- ⌚ Because of the nature of subterranean termite control, it is important that you fully understand what the technicians will actually be doing to your home during the treatment. You simply cannot know too much when it comes to understanding your termite control and treatment contract!

Conclusion

Choosing the right pest control company can provide you with peace of mind and security. Having a company that you can trust to do the job right will certainly make your life easier. Keeping your home as pest free as possible will also help to safeguard the health of you and your family. When you absolutely need to rid your home of unwanted guests, a pest control company can help ensure that the job is done right and completely. If you are able to locate an honest and trustworthy pest control company- stick with them! You never know when something scary might turn up in your home and require their services to get rid of them!

Checklist for Hiring a Pest Control Company

1. Determine what kind of pest problem you have and how you want to deal with it. (Chemically or biologically)
2. Use referrals from trusted sources, online searches or traditional advertising to locate several local companies. Create a list of 3-5 potential choices.
3. Perform some background research on each pest control company on your list by searching a consumer review website or contacting your local Better Business Bureau.
4. Interview your potential choices and ask plenty of questions. Find out pricing options.
5. Choose a pest control company that makes you feel comfortable with the entire process.
6. Carefully review the pest control company's contract. Once you have carefully reviewed and understood it, have both you and the company sign it. Then keep a copy.
7. Have the pest control company come in and get rid of your pest problem!

Pest Control Company Resources

US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)- Resources for Pest Management Page

www.epa.gov/pesticides/controlling/resources

The Better Business Bureau (BBB)- www.BBB.org

Angie's List- www.angieslist.com

PestWeb- Information Source on Pests- <http://pestweb.com>

National Pest Management Association (NPMA)- www.pestworld.org