
HIRING A PEST CONTROL COMPANY

Integrated Pest Management in and Around the Home

If you do not have the time or ability to research your pest problem and safely apply the appropriate procedures and materials to control it, you may want to hire a pest control service to do the job for you. A licensed professional also has access to some products not available in retail stores. To be effectively managed, many pest problems, like termites or problems on large trees, require specialized equipment, pesticides, and technical training.

Although professional services may seem costly, the investment may be worth it to solve a serious problem. A pest control professional, who practices integrated pest management methods and keeps up-to-date about the latest technologies, can provide you with the safest and most effective management strategies. If toxic chemicals are part of the pest management method, it is often safer for your family to have them handled by a professional.



BEFORE HIRING A COMPANY

1 Identify the pest and do some research about how to control it following the steps below.

- If you are not certain of the pest's identity, take it to your local University of California (UC) Cooperative Extension office or county agricultural commissioner's office. You can look up their local telephone numbers in your telephone directory. Ask their advice about management solutions.
- Check the online UC Pest Notes at www.ipm.ucdavis.edu for information on managing the pest. Based on this information, determine if management is needed and if it is, whether or not you can safely and effectively address the problem yourself.
- It may be possible for you to make changes in your landscaping or home design to permanently exclude or reduce pests and this can eliminate the need for professionals, even for serious pests. Examples would be to take out problem tree species and replace them with pest resistant ones or treat your pets with spot-on treatments for fleas and eliminate the need for treating carpets or outdoor areas for fleas.
- Pest management professionals often have access to more effective pesticides or other management tools not available to consumers. If this is the case for your pest, you may want to consider professional help.
- If repeated applications of a pesticide or procedures such as setting traps for skunks are required, ask yourself whether you have the skills or time to follow through. If not, hire a professional.
- If toxic chemicals or sophisticated application equipment are required, it is often best to hire a professional.

Obtain recommendations from neighbors, friends, or family about pest control services they have used. Call at least three companies and consider their methods as well as their customer service policy:

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- ❑ Find out what types of services the company offers. For example, do they provide monthly spray contracts or do they offer an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach that includes nonchemical methods?

- ❑ Find out if least-toxic alternatives are available to control the pest. Ask the company if these least-toxic pesticides or baits are used when appropriate. For example, confirm that exclusion methods, baits, and traps are employed against cockroaches (rather than sprays) and that baits (rather than sprays) are used for ants. For other examples of least-toxic approaches, look online at the UC Pest Notes, <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu>.



- ❑ Make sure the company has the required licenses, registration, certificates, and insurance.

- Pest control companies and individuals making household treatments must operate with a license issued by the California State Structural Pest Control Board. Verify the status of a pest control company's license online at <http://www.pestboard.ca.gov/license.htm> or telephone 800-737-8188.

- Individuals operating landscape maintenance or gardening businesses and performing yard pest control must possess a pest control business license and a Qualified Applicator Certificate or a Qualified Applicator License (QAC or QAL) issued by the California Department of Pesticide Regulation. The licensee should carry an identification card with an expiration date. Verify the status of an individual's certificate or a business' license online at <http://www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/license/currlic.htm> or telephone 916-445-4038.

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Ask the company to inspect the site.

- ❑ The company may charge a fee to do this inspection, but for that fee they should provide you with a written diagnosis of the problem or an identification of the pest. They should show you where the pest is causing the problem and discuss how they plan to control it. The company should also provide you with details regarding the course of treatment(s), the pesticide to be used—if required, the frequency of inspections and treatment, and an estimate of the cost of implementing the treatment plan. They should also provide you with information about the safety of any products they may apply and any precautions you would need to take, such protecting pets and children.

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Review the solutions.

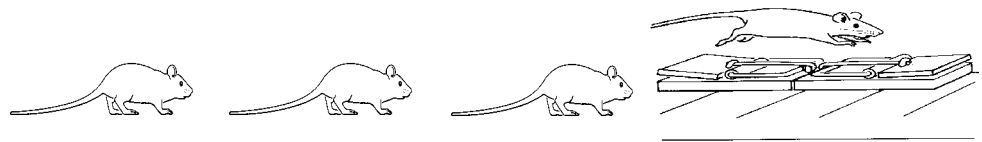
- ❑ Consider long-term solutions to the problem. A company that practices IPM will suggest modification of the habitat or use of baits and monitoring, rather than just guarantee to spray on a monthly basis or when and if the pest reappears. An IPM program may include pest management strategies like installing screens on windows, adding sweeps on the bottom of doors, or altering when or how you water your yard.
- ❑ Consider your chemical tolerance. Ask which pesticides will be used, the active ingredients they contain, and their effects on pets, the environment, and people—especially the elderly, the very young, or persons with environmental sensitivities. Determine if there are specific legal requirements specifying precautions to be taken after application. You may request a copy of the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS), which describes chemical qualities, hazards, and safety precautions for each pesticide used. Contact the pest control company and your county agricultural commissioner if you have further questions about pesticides to be used or consult the online National Pesticide Information Center at <http://npic.orst.edu/gen.htm> or telephone 1-800-858-7378.

- Ask how any pesticides will be applied and where. Chemicals sprayed around the home perimeter may be washed away by irrigation or rain, especially if concrete walkways or other water-repelling materials surround the home. Avoid this type of spraying as it is considered ineffective, costly, and may cause contamination of our waterways or drinking water.
- Avoid companies that offer only calendar chemical treatments featuring automatic monthly or quarterly perimeter sprays. This may or may not be necessary, as the pest may or may not be present at the time of application, and it is not an integrated or long-term pest management approach. Some approaches such as baiting for termites, do require regular monitoring and refilling of bait stations.

5 Review the contract.

The company should present information on the identified pest problem, the reasons behind a chosen treatment and the application techniques. A contract should state the following.

- Name of the company
- Length of the service
- Treatment plan
- Price
- Guarantee



A reputable pest control company should carry both general liability insurance and worker’s compensation insurance. Check the back of the contract for additional details, including possible exclusions. Can you or the company cancel the contract without penalty? Is there an arbitration clause or other method to settle a possible dispute?

AFTER HIRING A COMPANY

6 Stay in touch with the company to ensure that you are getting the service stated in your contract.

- Verify that the company is monitoring pest populations as agreed in the contract.
- Communicate to the company the levels of pests that are tolerable as well as intolerable. For example, you may tolerate ants in the landscape, but not inside the home.
- Inform the company of any changes in pest populations that you notice between visits.

7 Do your part to help manage the pest.

- In most cases, an effective pest management program will require that the customer carry out certain practices to reduce pest problems. These may include cleaning up food sources or areas that harbor pests such as removing woodpiles or debris, fixing plumbing leaks, or repairing structures. If you don’t do your part to follow through with these recommendations, the pest management program may fail to solve the problem.

Checklist for Working with a Pest Control Company

1. Identify the pest and do some research about how to control it.

2. If you decide to hire a professional, obtain recommendations from neighbors, friends, or family about pest control services they have used.

- Call at least three companies and consider their methods as well as their customer service policy.
- Find out what types of services the company offers.
- Find out if least-toxic alternatives are available to control the pest.
- Make sure the company has the required licenses, certificates, and insurance.

3. Ask the company to inspect the site.

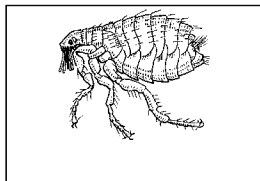
4. Review the solutions.

- Consider long-term solutions to the problem.
- Consider your chemical tolerance.
- Ask how the pesticide will be applied and where.
- Avoid companies that offer automatic monthly or quarterly sprays.

5. Review the contract.

6. Stay in touch with the pest control company.

- Verify that the company, as agreed in the contract, is monitoring pest populations.
- Communicate to the company the levels of pests that are tolerable.
- Inform the company of any changes in pest populations.



7. Do your part to help manage the pest.

- Clean up food sources.

For more information contact the University of California Cooperative Extension or agricultural commissioner's office in your county. See your telephone directory for addresses and phone numbers.

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To simplify information, trade names of products have been used. No endorsement of named products is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products that are not mentioned.

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WARNING ON THE USE OF CHEMICALS

Pesticides are poisonous. Always read and carefully follow all precautions and safety recommendations given on the container label. Store all chemicals in the original labeled containers in a locked cabinet or shed, away from food or feeds, and out of the reach of children, unauthorized persons, pets, and livestock.

Confine chemicals to the property being treated. Avoid drift onto neighboring properties, especially gardens containing fruits or vegetables ready to be picked.

Do not place containers containing pesticide in the trash or pour pesticides down sink or toilet. Either use the pesticide according to the label or take unwanted pesticides to a Household Hazardous Waste Collection site. Contact your county agricultural commissioner for additional information on safe container disposal and for the location of the Household Hazardous Waste Collection site nearest you. Dispose of empty containers by following label directions. Never reuse or burn the containers or dispose of them in such a manner that they may contaminate water supplies or natural waterways.

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