



## Questions to Ask Before Hiring a Pest Control Operator

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Many pest problems can be controlled by the homeowner using a combination of preventative measures, good sanitation and general-use pesticides. Occasionally, a pest problem becomes too large or too complex and homeowners elect to seek outside pest control assistance by hiring a pest control professional. How can you be sure the pest control company you hire will do a good job?

### **BEFORE you choose a pest control company, ask yourself:**

- Has the pest been positively identified by an expert? Without proper identification of the nuisance plant, insect or animal, it is difficult to develop an effective control strategy.
- What is the current life stage of the pest? Many pests are more susceptible to certain pesticides at specific life stages.
- Is the problem bad enough or big enough that the use of a pesticide is justified? It depends on your tolerance for the pest. This is a complex issue, since a few aphids on your rose bushes can be tolerable, but even one cockroach in your kitchen may be more than you can bear! Each pest infestation must be evaluated separately to determine if the size of the problem requires use of pesticides.
- Are there other, nonchemical means you can use to control the pest? Can you change a cultural practice or use a method to exclude the pest?

If, after asking these questions, you believe you need the assistance of a professional pest control operator, how do you go about finding and hiring one?

### **How to find a reputable pest control operator**

Most pesticide problems are not so time-sensitive that you can't take a little time to shop around for a pest control company. Ask your neighbors, friends and coworkers if they have used a pest control company with successful results.

- In the state of Nevada, only individuals with a "Nevada Custom Pest Control License" may apply pesticides for hire. There is a difference between certified and licensed applicators. If an individual is certified they may not apply pesticides for hire unless they work for a licensed pest control company under the supervision of a licensed applicator. Ask any pesticide applicator you plan to hire if they are licensed. Ask to see a copy of the license and check to make sure it is up-to-date. A pest control license will always have a photo I.D. of the licensee, similar to a driver's license.
- If you have a specific company in mind, you can call the Nevada Department of Agriculture (NDOA) for information. The NDOA cannot give recommendations, but can tell you if the company is licensed. You can also check the reputation of a business with the local Better Business Bureau or Chamber of Commerce.
- Seek estimates from several companies. In addition to providing a written estimate of cost, are the company representatives willing to take the time to explain possible alternatives, recommended actions and suggest the best way to achieve control of the pest infestation? Are they planning to use the least-toxic product available to control the specific pest?

- Ask each company to provide references, any professional organization affiliations and proof of insurance.
- Does the company offer a guarantee? What exactly is covered by the guarantee?
- Ask the company what training their employees receive and how often they receive training. How much experience do their workers have?
- Ask each company to discuss Integrated Pest Management (IPM) options for your infestation. IPM control methods may involve the use of monitoring devices, insect growth regulators, sanitation, cultural practices, trapping or other physical measures to avoid or reduce pest problems.

Choose a company that meets your pest control needs. A competent company will outline a pest control program that identifies the pests to be controlled, the extent of the infestation, the pesticides they intend to use, and the steps you can take to minimize future infestations.

**Avoid a company that engages in the following:**

- Treatments that include the use of “secret” chemicals. All pesticides must be registered with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.
- Treatments that are marketed as "special discounts" if you have the work done immediately.
- Special deals or other high-pressure sales tactics. You get what you pay for, and the lowest cost may not be the best deal in the long run.
- Pesticide applications on a fixed schedule. Pesticide applications should be done thoughtfully and only after a complete inspection. Unnecessary or excessive applications of pesticides can lead to unnecessary pesticide exposure to humans, pets and the environment.

**When you decide on a pest control company**

Once you decide on a pest control company, make sure you understand all facets of the pesticide application process:

- A pesticide application should only occur after a thorough inspection of your property or infestation.
- Ask for a firm, written estimate of costs, if you have not already received one.
- What pesticides will they apply? Ask for copies of the pesticide labels, so you have a record of what was applied. Ask if they have selected the least toxic product available to control your particular pest problem.
- How will the pesticides be applied?
- When will the pesticides be applied? Is this the most effective application time considering the growth stage of your particular pest?
- What do you need to do to prepare for the application? This may involve removing pets and other domestic animals, turning off your sprinklers, removing all foodstuffs from the kitchen, or finding temporary lodgings for you and your family.
- How long do you need to stay out of the area after the pesticide application has occurred? How long should you keep pets away from the application site?
- Is there a drying time or ventilation time required? Will there be lingering odors? Will cleanup of pesticide residues be required?
- How soon can you expect to see results?
- Will repeat treatments be necessary? How will you or the pest control company determine the need for additional treatments?

If you determine that a licensed pest control company is required to help you control a pest on your property, these tips will help maximize the results and minimize the potential for additional stress.

**Contacts**

Nevada Department of Agriculture, 405 S. 21st St., Sparks, NV 89431, 775-353-3600, [www.agri.nv.gov](http://www.agri.nv.gov)

University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Pesticide Safety Education Website, [www.nevadapesticideeducation.info](http://www.nevadapesticideeducation.info)

Better Business Bureau (Reno), [www.reno.bbb.org](http://www.reno.bbb.org)

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