How to Hire a Household Pest Control Professional

Fact Sheet FS018

Cooperative Extension

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Occasionally, insects or other pests may invade homes. Some may simply be nuisances that do not harm the home, its contents, or the inhabitants. Others may infest food products or damage fabrics. Some can damage the home's structure and others may pose a health risk to people and/or their pets.

The first step in dealing with any household pest is to have it identified. County-based Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE) personnel and/or trained RCE Master Gardener volunteers can provide information. To locate your county Extension office, check the blue pages of your phone book for listings under Rutgers Cooperative Extension or County Government, or visit the RCE website www.njaes.rutgers.edu/. Samples can also be submitted with the appropriate payment to the Rutgers Plant Diagnostics Lab (see Rutgers Cooperative Extension Resources on page two). Trained pest control professionals should also be able to identify the pest and provide control information about the pest.

After both the pest and its life cycle are known, the source of the infestation and conditions that may contribute to it can be determined. This information is essential before selecting control measures. For many, household pest situations solutions and treatments are available that will enable a homeowner to deal with the infestation themselves. Chemical, cultural, and physical control information for many household pests are available from Rutgers Cooperative Extension.

In some cases the problem may require the help of a pest control professional. Professional assistance may be useful for carpenter ant and certain other ant species, carpet beetle, cockroach and flea control, and is always necessary to manage termite infestations. Recurring infestations of other pests may also warrant professional help.

Finding a Professional

Family, friends, and neighbors can be helpful resources for amassing a list of businesses to contact. In the phone book yellow pages, look for companies that are members of national, state or local pest control organizations. Check with the Consumer Bureau or Better Business Bureau for any complaints registered about companies on your list. All New Jersey businesses that apply pesticides must be registered with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP). Any person who applies pesticides for hire as part of his or her job must have a current, valid New Jersey pesticide license or be registered with NJDEP as a pesticide operator. In addition, a licensed pesticide applicator must be present during all termite applications. Pest control professionals dealing with household pests and/or termites and other wood-destroying pests must be licensed in those specialties. Plan to have several companies evaluate your situation to provide treatment proposals and cost estimates.

Choosing a Professional

First, be an educated consumer – learn about the pest that you are confronting. Then "interview" prospective pest control companies. Ask to see professional credentials. The company representative should be able to clearly explain the identified problem and the techniques and materials they will be using. Do they practice Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategies in a combination of control methods? Check on liability insurance coverage and ask for a Certificate of Insurance. Request references for recent and similar work done by the company and check them. What guarantee, if any, is offered? With all of this information at hand, compare proposals and costs.

Beware of companies that appear unsolicited at the door, urge a quick decision by offering a "special" deal, provide treatment or cost information without visiting and examining the site, claim endorsement by a university or government agency, or offer a price substantially lower or higher than the average of all the estimates.

Contracting a Professional

Once a company is selected, the details of the work to be done, the cost and any guarantee must be obtained in writing as with any contracted work. New Jersey law requires the pesticide applicator or operator to provide the customer with the following information before any pesticide application is made. This information must be provided allowing time for the customer to read it and receive pesticide labels, if requested:

RUTGERS
New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
88 Lipman Drive, New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8525
Phone: 732.932.5000

1. The proposed date(s) of the application – if you request prior notification of the exact date of application, it must be provided.
2. The brand name(s) of the pesticide(s) to be used and, if available, the common chemical name of the active ingredient(s).
3. The pesticide(s) label instructions that relate to customer and general public safety, including stated precautions.
4. The Consumer Information Sheet that all pesticide application businesses are required to possess and provide to all clientele.

Some additional rules may apply to pesticide applications to multi-family residences and commercial and public spaces. For information on these unique situations, contact your local health department or state pesticide control program.

Additional Considerations When Hiring a Termite Control Professional

There is no "standard" post-construction termite control method or procedure. The nature of the site, the type of construction and the extent of the infestation will determine treatment. New Jersey has a number of specific regulations governing termiticide applications. A thorough inspection must be done before treatment is proposed and the treatment proposal must include a diagram of the building with existing visible termite damage and the treatments specified for various locations.

If a termite problem has been confirmed, take time to select the company to perform treatment. There is no need to rush because termites work slowly. Ask how long the company has been doing termite treatments and how many they do annually – experience is important. Make sure that all terms and conditions of a guarantee are given in writing and are clear. There are likely to be exclusions related to pre-existing damage, to secondary termite infestations (colonies living without contact with soil because there is an alternate source of moisture) and to post-treatment soil disturbance during structural or landscape alterations.

Rutgers Cooperative Extension Resources

Rutgers Diagnostic Laboratory
(P): 732-932-9140, (F): 732-932-1270
e-mail: clinic@njaes.rutgers.edu
www.njaes.rutgers.edu/plantdiagnosticlab/

Rutgers Recommendations for Household and Structural Insect Pests
Call RCE County Offices for current issue.
www.njaes.rutgers.edu/

Additional Resources:

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.
(P): 609-530-4070
www.state.nj.us/dep/enforcement/pcp

The New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs
(P): 973-504-6200
www.state.nj.us/lps/ca/home.htm

The Better Business Bureau of New Jersey, Inc.
(P): 609-858-0808
newjersey.bbb.org/

New Jersey Pest Management Association
(P): 800-524-9942
www.njpma.com

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