

# State of Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

## Consumer Tips on Purchasing Pest Control Services

A Guide for Residential Homeowners

Bureau of Licensing and Enforcement  
3125 Conner Blvd, Lab 8  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1650

(850) 617-7997 ph.  
(850) 617-7967 fax



Florida Department of  
Agriculture and Consumer Services  
Adam H. Putnam, Commissioner

Pest control, like any other kind of business, is a joint venture between the company and the customer. As with many businesses, the customer may have difficulty judging the quality or value of services received against the money spent for those services.

### Understanding Pest Control Operations

Pest control companies are operated by people with specific responsibilities within the firm. Larger companies will have more personnel to spread the duties across while a smaller company might have one person performing all of the duties.

In general, the different functions within a firm are: the business license holder and the certified pest control operator (usually considered management); and service technicians (normally the employees).

Within larger firms you will have further job duties assigned such as office manager, route manager, and sales or service managers.

Employees may also perform specific pest control duties such as general household, lawn & ornamental or pest control for termites.

If you are receiving unsatisfactory services, you should first try to discuss your complaint with the certified operator in charge, the service manager, or the owner/licensee.

The business license holder (licensee) is normally the owner of the company who has obtained licensing from the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Bureau of Licensing and Enforcement, to operate a pest control business.

It is illegal to perform pest control services without a pest control business license.

The licensee is responsible for records, reports, advertising, and supplying personal protective equipment, pesticides and supplies to his employees. All records of pest control

activities, including contracts must be kept at the specific business location or address specified within the business license application.

The licensee is also responsible for obtaining employee identification cards for all employees performing pest control services.

The certified pest control operator is in charge of the pest control operations of the licensee. (Remember, it's possible for the certified operator to be the owner/licensee.) The certified pest control operator is the real pest control professional in the company who has demonstrated competence in pest control services and supervision of such work.

Certified pest control operators have had to pass a rigid examination to demonstrate competence. Qualification for the exam required a minimum of three years of pest control experience with a licensee or a college degree in entomology, ornamental horticulture, or pest control technology.

Presently, there are four certification categories: General Household and Rodent, Lawn & Ornamental, Termite & Other Wood-Destroying Organisms, and Fumigation. A certified operator might be certified in one, two, three or all four categories.

The licensee must have a certified operator in charge of each category of pest control that they provide service for. If their certified operator is only certified in General Household, they cannot perform lawn, termite or fumigation work.

The certified operator is responsible for the training, chemical selection and proper use of the methods and materials suitable for the pest control undertaken by the employees.

The certified operator trains the service technicians to perform their pest control work and the appropriate safety practices such as safe storage, proper use and proper disposal of pesticide products.

The certified operator is jointly responsible with the licensee for obtaining the employee identification card for all service employees performing pest control. This card will have the employee's photograph and signature affixed to it and you may ask to see it.

Pest control salespersons are employees of the licensee hired to inspect premises, determine the extent of problems and give estimates for pest control services. These inspections and estimates are often performed for free, and consumers should get several estimates and compare the type of work to be performed to make an informed decision.

Salespersons make their living by influencing you to select their company for your pest control needs. Do not accept high pressure sales. There is RARELY a need to treat a problem IMMEDIATELY. Take your time and obtain other estimates to make sure that the diagnosis is correct and the estimate is reasonable.

### **How to Select Pest Control Services Wisely**

Your first contact with a pest control company will normally be through a salesperson. Regulations prohibit misleading a consumer with fraudulent reporting of infestations. However, consumers must still purchase pest control services wisely and understand what they are contracting for.

TIPS for selecting a company:

1. Shop around for the best service at a reasonable price.
2. If you do not know how to recognize insect infestation or damage, ask the salesperson to show it to you. He must have evidence to recommend a treatment.
3. Have the salesperson disclose, in writing, that the premise or structure is infested with a specific pest, describe the pest location and what treatment services they will perform (in detail).

4. For termite work, a copy of the written contract/warranty must be provided to you, in advance, so that you can read it completely and compare it with other company's services. Ask the salesperson to explain any parts that you do not understand.
5. Get opinions from two or more pest control firms to confirm the salesperson's diagnosis and pricing, particularly on an expensive or extensive treatment.
6. Check with the Better Business Bureau and your friends and family to see who they do business with to determine if the company handles their complaint(s) promptly and their customer(s) fairly.

### **Contracts**

The current regulations require written contracts to be used for Termite and Other Wood-Destroying Organism Control. However, most companies utilize written contracts for all of their pest control services.

It is very important to make sure you have read and understood the entire contract, including all of its terms and limitations.

If you sign a contract, even if you did not read it (or relied on the salesperson's interpretation), it will still be a binding legal document and our assistance will be limited to the terms and conditions within that contract.

### **Wood-Destroying Organism Contracts**

A pest control company must give you a written contract/warranty prior to any preventative or corrective treatment for any wood-destroying organism. This contract must be provided to you before any work is done and before any payment is made so that you have an opportunity to thoroughly read it and understand exactly what services are being provided.

Termite and Other Wood-Destroying Organism pest control is not an easy task. These

are living organisms that can react to stimuli, avoid treatments, and relocate to other areas. Occasionally, a company will have to re-treat for a problem (this is primarily what the written contract or warranty addresses).

Pest control companies will use products and methods that they believe will control your pest problems. Some will use liquid soil treatments, some will use baiting/monitoring systems and others will perform direct-wood treatments.

The regulations require the contract/warranty to disclose, on the first page in bold print, whether the contract/warranty is for "Retreatment and Repair"; "Retreatment ONLY"; and "NO WARRANTY/GUARANTEE".

Retreatment and Repair will obligate the company to return to perform retreatment and to repair any "NEW" damage caused by termites. Be sure to understand how "new" damage is determined and the repair limits.

Retreatment Only contracts will obligate the company to return and perform additional treatments to control the infesting organism. There will be NO repairs at all.

No Warranty/Guarantee contracts are for spot treatments and situations where construction defects prevent the pest control company from being able to establish proper barriers, wood treatments, or bait/monitoring system placements.

Termites and other wood-destroying organisms can cause some anxiety, but NEVER rush a treatment decision. It is to your advantage to take an extra couple of days or weeks to obtain additional estimates and contract terms to your liking.

TIPS for understanding termite contracts:

Be sure you understand...

1. All structures or building that will be included in the treatment.

2. The duration of the contract and its renewal terms. (Most contracts are for five year periods, renewable annually, but others renew perpetually.)
3. Be sure the common name of the wood-destroying organism to be controlled by the contract/warranty is indicated. Make sure you know what organisms are NOT covered as well.
4. The contract should state whether the treatment is preventative (protection only) or corrective (treating an active infestation).
5. If it is a Retreatment and Repair contract/warranty, make sure you understand what conditions must occur to require the company to perform retreatment and/or repair. Also confirm that the maximum repair amount is disclosed.
6. The maximum price for the contract and the annual renewal amount must be disclosed. Verify how long the renewal rate will remain the same and, if it's allowed to increase, does the contract/warranty disclose a basis for the renewal increase (maximum percentage, cost of living, inflation, etc.)

### **Complaint Resolution**

The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Bureau of Inspection and Incident Response regulates the structural pest control industry under Chapter 482, Florida Statutes and/or Chapter 5E-14, Florida Administrative Code.

The Bureau has no authority to adjudicate or arbitrate in disputes between consumers and pest control companies. Disagreeing parties must resolve disputes in civil court.

The Bureau will investigate any consumer complaint to determine if the pest control company is in compliance with our regulations.

Any violation noted by the inspector will be forwarded to the Bureau's headquarters, located

in Tallahassee, where the evidence will be reviewed and, if appropriate, a determination made regarding the issuance of an administrative action.

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