

CITY OF SAN DIEGO STORM WATER POLLUTION PROGRAM

INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT

Smart Tips for Hiring a Pest Control Service

If you are thinking of hiring a pest control service there are some important things to consider before you take that step. Here is a checklist to help you hire a service that will adequately research your pest problem and safely apply the appropriate material to control it.

Should I hire a Pest Control Service?

Determine if the pest problem warrants hiring a pest control professional:

- Is the damage or nuisance something you can live with?
- Can you safely and effectively treat the problem yourself?
- Can you make changes that will control the pest problem over the long term and eliminate the need for any chemical control?

Get Recommendations and Facts

Obtain recommendations from neighbors, friends or family. Call at least three companies and consider the following:

- What types of services does the company offer? For example, do they provide only monthly spray contracts or do they offer an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach?
- Are least-toxic pesticides or baits used when appropriate?
- Is the company operating with the required licenses, certificates and insurance? Pest control companies and individuals making household treatments must operate with a license issued by the Structural Pest Control Board. Verify the status of a pest control company's license online at <http://www.pestboard.ca.gov/license.htm>.
- Individuals operating in landscape maintenance or gardening businesses and performing incidental pest control must possess a Qualified Applicator Certificate or License (QAC or QAL) issued by the California Department of Pesticide Regulation. Verify the status of an individual or business QAC or QAL online at <http://www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/license/currlic.htm>.
- Most reputable pest control companies carry both general liability insurance and worker's compensation insurance.

Ask for an Inspection

- 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 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 frequency of inspections and treatment, and an estimate of the cost of implementing their treatment plan.
- 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 a guarantee to spray when and if the pest reappears.
- Ask which pesticides will be used, the active ingredients they contain, and their effects on people, pets and the environment. Determine if there are specific label instructions for precautions after application. You may request a copy of the Material Safety Data Sheet from the pest control company for each pesticide used.
- Ask how the pesticide 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 impervious materials surround the home. Avoid companies that do this type of spraying.

- Is the company forthcoming with information on the identified pest problem, the reasons behind a chosen treatment, and the application techniques?

Monitor the Work

Following selection of a pest control company, continue a dialogue with the company to insure that you are getting the service stated in your contract.

- Verify that pest populations are being monitored by the company 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 appearance or increase in pest populations that you notice between visits.

Keep These Tips in Mind

Important considerations to keep in mind when applying pesticides in your garden, landscape or home:

- Be aware of weather patterns and do not apply pesticides just prior to rainfall or during windy conditions.
- Avoid the use of pesticides such as diazinon and chlorpyrifos that have been detected in streams, rivers and lakes. These specific products are no longer available for purchase, and can be disposed of at a household hazardous waste collection facility.
- Avoid the use of "broad-spectrum" insecticides. These products indiscriminately kill many types of insects, including beneficial and desirable species, and damage the balance between pest populations and their natural enemies. Frequent use of broad-spectrum pesticides can also result in the development of resistant strains of pests or secondary outbreaks of other pests.
- Under no circumstances should pest control equipment be cleaned in a location where rinse water could flow into gutters, storm drains or open waterways.
- Be aware that some pesticides are more easily carried in surface runoff than others and therefore have a greater potential to move off-site during irrigation or rain events. The leaching and runoff risks of specific pesticides can be obtained from UC Riverside's Pesticide Wise web site at <http://www.pw.ucr.edu>. Just enter the pesticide trade name or active ingredient and the conditions under which the material will be applied, such as type of soil texture, slope, irrigation rate and vegetative cover.

Information From: Cheryl Wilen, San Diego area IPM Advisor; Darren Hewer; Mary Louise Flint; Pamela M. Geisel, University of California Cooperative Extension Farm Advisor, Environmental Horticulture, Fresno County; Carolyn L. Unruh, University of California Cooperative Extension Fresno County staff writer.