

# Do-It-Yourself Pest Control



Many people ask, "Can I save money by doing my own pest control?" The answer is "Maybe!" It really depends on a variety of factors.

Three pre-requisites must be satisfied BEFORE undertaking any pest control work, or the program will be doomed from the very start. First, the offending pest has to be positively identified; second, the pest life cycle must be fully understood; and, third, the habits of the pest need to be understood. These steps are essential because they help determine when, where and how to treat -- and, often, this is more important than what insecticide to use. A knowledge of pest habits and life cycles also helps determine if there are alternative control strategies -- possibly including no action.

If all the previously stated pre-requisites are satisfied, then nearly all pests can be controlled by the do-it-yourselfer.

There are, however, several instances where a professional pest control operator (PCO) will be necessary and economical. I can think of three instances where I DO NOT recommend do-it-yourself pest control:

- 1) When the insect pest can be satisfactorily controlled only with a restricted use pesticide (RUP);
- 2) When the insect pest requires special equipment and/or techniques (i.e., termite control); and

- 3) When the pest identification, biology and habit pre-requisites have not been satisfied.

It easily can be a waste of time and money (not to mention endangering family health) to attempt pest control without some knowledge of what is being attempted. It is not uncommon for people to attempt their own pest control, fail miserably, and have to hire a professional PCO anyway!

Remember also, you hire a PCO not just for his/her technical skill; you are paying for their knowledge, experience and advice as well. Feel free to ask questions about your pest control requirements and programs. With their help, you may be able to learn more about pest control in your home.

## Selecting a PCO Firm

When selecting pest control services, shop for value -- not price. If the price seems too high, don't hesitate to get additional estimates. In fact, it is a good practice to get at least three estimates, especially for those high-cost jobs. Beware of the "too good to be true" bargains. Check the credentials of the prospective companies you select. Here are some suggestions:

- 1) Is the company licensed and certified by the state of Michigan? By Michigan law, all PCO's must be licensed to operate in the state and at least one

employee must be tested and certified to apply pesticides.

2) Does the company have an established business (preferably in your area)? If so, you can check their reputation with the local Chamber of Commerce, Better Business Bureau or Consumer Protection Division (Michigan Attorney General's Office).

3) Ask the company for references on previous customers, or ask your friends and neighbors about their experiences. Don't be afraid to check these references.... a reliable PCO will welcome this cautious approach.

4) Is the firm is a member of the Michigan and/or National Pest Control Association? Although this is not a necessity, it does assure you that the company subscribes to a code of ethics and strives to keep up with the latest developments in the pest control industry.

### **Beware of...**

Companies that stop by and offer a free inspection (uninvited inspection); quote a treatment cost based on a gallonage of material used; profess to have a secret insect formula; do not have a listed telephone number; want to trim trees and do general foundation repair work as part of the deal; cater to elderly or infirmed people who live alone; claim to be endorsed by or affiliated with Michigan State University; claim to have excess chemical left from another job and offer a reduced rate if they can do the treatment immediately.

### **Inspections**

By now, you probably have a company in mind. Have them inspect your home for evidence of infestation (if they already haven't). Many PCO's offer inspections and estimates at no charge. A thorough PCO inspection should include a written report noting the location and severity of any infestation(s), the exact pest involved, and the cost estimate for correcting the problem. It may also note pest entryways,

structural deficiencies, and sanitation problems that contribute to the infestation. If you are not familiar with the pest or its damage, ask to see the problem. Be sure you understand the pest and what it will take to solve the problem. If you don't understand, ask questions.

When the inspection is completed, insist on a written copy. This report is certification that an infestation exists and requires treatment (Federal law requires that a pest must be present in order to recommend treatment). Also, ask whether the cost estimate is a firm price -- be cautious if it isn't.

If you have any doubts about the inspection information you were given, and you wish an unbiased opinion, contact the MSU Cooperative Extension Service office in your county.

### **Contracts and Guarantees**

A pest control contract is similar to most other contracts. Be certain you read and understand the contract. If you have questions, ask the serviceman for an explanation. Find out if the contract includes any type of guarantee. Know what the guarantee covers, how long it lasts, and what you must do to keep it in force. This is also a good time to inquire about your obligation to the PCO, that is, whether you must vacate the premises (and for how long), empty cupboards, or remove pets or other articles. Lastly, for your protection, make sure there are no infield blanks on the contract, and keep your copy in a safe place.

### **Delivery of Services**

The manner in which a pest control service communicates with customers shows the overall quality of the pest control firm, and their concern for your health and welfare. Look for the following:

1. Is the service vehicle dirty and messy? Is it marked with the company's name?
2. Is the service technician considerate, courteous and careful with your

- belongings while working? Does he/she replace items moved during the job?
3. Every time a spray is applied indoors, you should be instructed to keep pets and children away from surfaces until they are dry.
  4. The technician should point out any damage present before spraying, such as stains, burns, etc., so you will not think his/her spraying caused the problem.
- Finally, if you suspect that your family's health and safety have been compromised by a PCO's improper use of pesticides, contact the closest office of the MI Dept. of Agriculture, Plant Industry Division. This agency regulates pesticides users and enforces a variety of laws pertaining to businesses that apply pesticides.

### Post-Service Problems

After your home has been treated for an insect problem, be sure you have complied with the PCO's suggestions and sanitation, fix-up, etc., and remain vigilant for any continuing damage or infestation.

It is not unusual to see increased insect activity immediately after treatment, but if after several days, you continue to detect damage or infestation, call the company to discuss your observations. A reliable PCO will take whatever steps necessary to ensure your satisfaction and preserve his/her reputation. If you cannot come to an agreement with the PCO on correcting the situation, including ineffective treatment or damage, you have the option of filing a civil suit. If you opt for this route, be certain you have a copy of your contract. It is also a good idea to keep notes on everything that the pest control company tells you after you have confronted them with the complaint.

## Would you like additional information?

**Additional information is available on-line. Please see [MSU Extension-Oakland County's publications](#) as well s [MSU Extension's Bulletin Office](#) on campus.**

**Contact our [Plant & Pest Hotline](#) (248/858-0902) for assistance with plant identification, pests and diseases, weeds, trees and shrubs, lawn, flowers, fruits, vegetables, grasses and groundcovers, native plants, plant propagation, and many other gardening topics.**