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**When to call a pest control company:** Whereas many home, garden and landscape insect/mite pest problems can be dealt with by the homeowner, some are more complicated, hazardous or call for applying restricted use product that requires a pesticide applicator license. In addition, some pest problems warrant special equipment or are hard to reach. For example, protective clothing may be needed to remove a large wasp nest. Bed-bug or carpenter ant infestations may require special procedures to be effective. Hiring an exterminator can be expensive, so homeowners must decide for themselves when it is worth the investment. They should take time to investigate the situation before proceeding. The first step is to collect several specimens of the suspected pest in a jar and get them identified. In Vermont you can contact the Master Gardener Hotline (<https://www.uvm.edu/extension/mastergardener/helpline>), the UVM Extension Entomologist or the State entomologist.



Carpenter ants, *Camponotus* spp. are a pest that may require professional exterminator services.

### Key information to tell a pest control company

After speaking with one of the entomology specialists, you may determine that the services of a pest control company are needed. This is a decision only you can make with input from specialists. When contacting a pest control company to obtain a quote for their services, you should inform them that the insect has been identified by an expert. Describe the extent of the infestation, including how widespread it may be, the symptoms you observe. If they indicate that they are able to help with the problem, you should collect basic information from several companies before selecting one. There can be a wide range in cost and work quality among pest control companies, so it is wise to contact 2-3 different companies before deciding who should do the work.

### Key questions to ask when contacting a Pest control Company

**Is the company licensed and insured?** In Vermont, employees of pest control companies must be certified as commercial applicators. To become certified, they must pass an exam and renew their certification annually. Anyone who uses a pesticide on the property of others must be a commercial applicator and be affiliated with a licensed pesticide applicator company. You should ask if the company is licensed by the state and if their employees who would apply a pesticide on your property are certified. You should ask if their certification is current, and it may be wise to ask for a copy of their license. Ask how long they have been in business and how many years the pesticide applicator has worked for the company.

Most pest control companies carry general liability insurance, which should include insurance for accidental pollution resulting from an application. They should also carry workmen's compensation insurance. This should protect you from liability if their employee is hurt while working on your property.

**Does the company have specific experience with managing the type of pest you have?** Pest control companies are expected to deal with a wide variety of insect and mite pests, as well as rodents and small mammals. Ask them if they have specific knowledge and experience with your pest. Also ask them for references that you can call to ask about the quality of their work, and you should check them. Ask friends and neighbors for recommended companies.

### Will the company fully discuss their management recommendation?

The company should explain exactly what they intend to do to manage the pest and what pesticide they will use. They should also provide you with a treatment plan that includes how many applications they will make and how often. Ask if there are non-chemical actions that can be taken instead of a pesticide. If a pesticide is warranted, ask them to use the least toxic chemical available for the pest. Even products certified as organic may be toxic or have residual effects. As for a copy of the label of the product and the MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheet). All chemical pesticides have a label that provides specific details about how to use the product, what pests it can be used for and how to apply it. They also have an MSDS which provides details on how to handle the product and clean up after application. The applicator should show you that information. Check online for additional information about the pesticide (<http://npic.orst.edu/NPRO/>). Ask what else you should do to avoid the pest from returning. For example, carpenter ants commonly build colonies in wet wood resulting from a leak. The leak should be repaired and rotten wood removed as part of a treatment plan, though that would not be the responsibility of the pest control company.



Bed bugs, *Cimex lectularius*, another pest that may need a professional.

### What to Know Before They Spray

- ✓ What is the product name?
- ✓ What is the active ingredient?
- ✓ Are there any adverse health effects for humans or pets?
- ✓ What are the symptoms of poisoning from the compound applied?
- ✓ Are there any special precautions to take before the treatment is made.

**Is there a charge for an inspection and preparing a cost estimate?** Some companies will come to your home to determine the extent of the problem from which they can prepare a quote. There can be a wide range in cost among pest control companies so it is wise to contact 2-3 different companies before deciding who should do the work.

**Does the company guarantee their work?** Some pests can be persistent and difficult to eliminate. Carpenter ants and bed bugs are two such examples. They may require multiple applications. You should ask for some sort of guarantee. If they won't provide one, you may want to find another company.

**Does the company draw up a contract describing the scope of work and cost?** Some companies will come to your home to determine the extent of the problem from which they can prepare a quote. The cheapest may not be the best option. You must weigh all the factors, including how confident you are about the company.

### Useful websites:

- National Pesticide Information Center. <http://www.npic.orst.edu/>
- Pesticides. US Environmental Protection Agency. <https://www.epa.gov/pesticides>
- Choosing a Pest Control Company. <https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2015-10/documents/pest-control-company.pdf>

Images used in this factsheet were obtained from several different websites, too many to mention. We appreciate those who contributed to promoting Integrated Pest Management through their images.