When you discover a pest problem in or around your home, the first step is to identify the pest. The pest may be a weed, plant disease, insect, rodent, mold, mildew, bird, or other nuisance. Penn State Extension has resources that can provide accurate pest identification and pest control options. Some problems may be more than a homeowner can handle and may require a qualified professional pesticide applicator.

QUESTIONS TO ASK A PEST MANAGEMENT OR LAWN CARE COMPANY

When you determine that professional help is needed, contact several companies to make sure the one you choose meets all the legal and educational requirements that give them the privilege to service your home. This would include verifying a valid and current:

- Pennsylvania Pesticide Applicator Certification or Registered Technician card (see list at the end for certification categories)
- Business license (requires the company to have general liability insurance coverage specific to pesticide applications)

All of the above are required to commercially apply pesticides in Pennsylvania. Ask about their membership in professional trade associations, which generally offer ongoing education in safety, training, research, and regulations. Ask the business for a list of local references that you can call to learn about the company’s past performance. Also, check with the local Chamber of Commerce and the Better Business Bureau regarding the firm’s past work performance.

Penn State Extension has resources that can provide accurate pest identification and pest control options.
GATHERING MORE INFORMATION
Expect pest management professionals to provide information on a wide assortment of pesticide-related topics, such as personal safety and environmental impact. They should discuss chemical tactics along with alternative weed, insect, plant disease, and rodent control strategies. The company must provide pesticide labels on request. Many answers to your questions will be found on the label instructions.

The pesticide must be labeled for use on the site (such as lawns, ornamentals, dwellings, vegetables, etc.) and preferably specify the pest or evidence of the pest in the future? The company must provide pesticide business license number (BUXXXX) and pesticide application. Although timing is important, make sure you understand why an application must be done at a specific time.

Ask plenty of questions and make sure you understand the answers!

- What is the correct identification of the pest?
- Can you show me the pest or evidence of the pest and/or damage?
- Are there effective control options besides pesticides, such as IPM? (See box below for definition.)
- Do we need to use pesticides? If so, which ones and why?
- How many different pesticides can control the pest?
- Are some pesticides safer or more "environmentally friendly" than others yet still effective?
- Are there any special precautions for children and pets for the treatment option chosen?
- When, where, and how should I check for the pest in the future?
- Can I help prevent this pest problem from occurring again without using pesticides?
- How long will it take to apply the treatment?
- How soon can we use the area that was treated?
- How long will the treatment continue to control the pest?
- Will more treatments be needed, and if so, how often?
- What results can we expect?

BEWARE OF PEST MANAGEMENT OR LAWN CARE COMPANIES THAT . . .

- Have unlisted phone numbers.
- Have no BU number on vehicles. The pesticide business license number (BUXXXX) must be prominently displayed on both sides of all vehicles involved in pesticide applications.
- Claim to have a secret formula or more potent pesticide. All pesticides must be registered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).
- Claim to be endorsed by colleges or universities, EPA, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, or other state agencies.
- Pressure you into an immediate decision.
- Use scare tactics to rush you into a pesticide application. Although timing is important, make sure you understand why an application must be done at a specific time.

- Confirm a pest identification from your description over the phone. Although some pests can be identified from an accurate description, it typically requires an on-site visit. Correct pest identification is important for proper treatment.

Remember, you do not have to make a decision on the phone and you should talk with several companies.

EVALUATE WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED TO CHOOSE A QUALIFIED COMPANY
Selecting a company should not be done hastily. Ask many questions until you understand the answers, and consult with several companies before making a final decision and signing a contract. You always have time to check with other companies, professional organizations, and your local Penn State Extension office.

You may need several days to consider everything you have heard and read company documentation. Although cost is a consideration, it should not be the most important factor in your decision. You should choose a company based on their strong professional commitment toward effective, environmentally safe, and friendly pest management service.

Once you have chosen a company, ask about expected outcomes and, if it becomes necessary, how the written or verbal agreement can be canceled.

What Is IPM?
IPM stands for integrated pest management. This approach to managing pests such as insects, plant diseases, weeds, and animals integrates appropriate cultural, biological, mechanical, and chemical tactics that are safe and environmentally compatible.

Additional Resources
National Pesticide Information Center
Provides unbiased pesticide information:
npic.orst.edu or 1-800-858-7378

American Association of Poison Control Centers
For poison emergencies and prevention: 1-800-222-1222 or PoisonHelp.org
For poison prevention and education: aapcc.org

Penn State Pesticide Education Program
For fact sheets and pesticide safety information: extension.psu.edu/pests-and-diseases
or email pesticide@psu.edu

Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
For business/applicator licensing, enforcement, and pesticide complaints: 1-717-772-5231 or www.agriculture.pa.gov/Plants_Land_Water/PlantIndustry/health-safety/Pages/default.aspx

Penn State Extension
For pest identification and control options: extension.psu.edu/pests-and-diseases/pest-disease-and-weed-identification
For county office contacts: extension.psu.edu/county-offices

Better Business Bureau
Promotes ethical business practices so consumers can make informed buying decisions: Metro Washington, DC, Metro Philadelphia, and Eastern Pennsylvania: 1-202-393-8000
Western Pennsylvania: 1-877-267-5222
www.bbb.org

National State Pesticide Information Retrieval System
A searchable online database of pesticide products registered in Pennsylvania: npirspublic.ceris.purdue.edu/state