



The 5 Biggest Mistake Buyers Make When Hiring a Pest Control Company (And How to Avoid Them)

By Doug Longfellow, *President NaturZone Pest Control*

Think back to this morning when you drove to your office, mentally preparing for your day. What was the single largest business concern on your mind? Maybe it was how to deal with rising insurance or property tax issues. Perhaps it was preparing for an important board meeting. Upon arrival at the office imagine a message from the Board President your largest client stating that “the Bug Man” did not show up on schedule: residents are irate because they have been waiting all day for treatment. Did your priorities for the day just change?

Pest control services are a low priority – high priority service; they are normally not something we think about until a problem arises. We may never totally avoid a pest control emergency; we can reduce the stress caused by pests with pro-active action.

As a pest control professional for over 30 years, I want to pull back the curtains on how to properly hire a pest control professional. Following this advice will leave you with less stress, happier clients and more time to focus on pressing business concerns.

Before we get into how to hire a pest control professional, let’s think about what our objectives should be:

- ✓ Save property managers time (and stress) by managing the pest control program
- ✓ Control unwanted pests.
- ✓ Best value for money

With these objectives in mind, the following are the 5 biggest mistakes buyers make when hiring a pest control professional and how to avoid them.

Mistake #1: Making the decision based on price alone

The famous Gucci proclaimed, *“Quality is remembered long after price is forgotten”*. This statement is especially true when hiring a pest control company, as the cost of a poor choice is unhappy residents and spending valuable time on pest control issues.

Pest control services represent a very small cost in most associations overall operating budget. Doesn’t it make sense to hire someone that will save you time and protect your reputation even if it cost a few dollars more?

Mistake #2: Not interviewing the pest control vendor

You wouldn’t hire an associate based solely on a resume, so why would you grant a pest control vendor access to your owners’ homes without an interview? A face to face interview allows you to use your professional judgment on the quality of the vendor that will be representing your management company.

With advanced planning this process does not have to be time consuming.

Mistake #3: Not having a set of basic vendor requirements, to protect the association.

The following is a quick check list you may want to consider:

- ✓ At least 1M in liability insurance
- ✓ Employees undergo criminal background checks and drug testing.
- ✓ Verified technician training.
- ✓ Experience doing commercial work. 98% of all US pest control companies are primarily residential service providers. Commercial environments are more complex than a single family home, and require special training.
- ✓ Professional uniform practices.
- ✓ Code of conduct while on property.
- ✓ Experience level of technician that will be performing the pest control services on your property. I recommend they have 2+ years experience servicing properties similar to yours.
- ✓ A 30 day “out clause” for dissatisfaction in the service agreement. If the company is confident in the quality of their services this should not be a problem.
- ✓ Require the company to come back at no additional charge to control covered pests.
- ✓ List of trade associations to which they belong. Just as property managers that belong to CAI tend to be the crème de la crème, good pest control companies invest in their industry.

Mistake #4: Not having an idea of the right program for your property

As a property manager you are not supposed to have the expertise of a pest control professional, however using good judgment can help you evaluate if the proposed program makes sense for your property.

We recently brought on a client whose biggest complaint against the previous vendor was that the pest control technician had missed the appointed day to “*spray*” the units several times. A no-show by the technician caused the property manager to take endless calls from upset owners that were waiting all day.

The property was high rise and the few pest complaints (mostly ants) they had were actually outside pests that had found their way inside. Our solution was to spend 80% of our time outside preventing pest issues, treat all the units’ interiors once a year, and handle interior complains on an as-needed basis. Therefore no one had to sit around waiting on the “bug man” to show up.

Furthermore, if a vendor proposes regular “*spraying*” of residents’ interiors as the primary activity they will be performing, this is your first clue that they may not be using cutting edge pest control technology and may be causing unnecessary disruption to your

business with little actual benefit. There are 2 trends that support a different methodology. Firstly, 95% of all pest control complaints in condominiums are outside pests that have made their way in, primarily ants and palmetto bugs (American Cockroaches). Secondly, many condominiums are now in a rental pool occupied primarily by people on vacation. I don't know about you, but when I'm on vacation the last thing I want to see knocking at my door is the bug guy! So if 95% of the problems come in from the outside and I'm upsetting my revenue base by spraying the interiors of units, why do it? Doesn't it make more sense to spend 80-90% of the time with pro-active exterior services preventing pest issues in the first place and the rest of the time solving interior pest issues? An added benefit to this approach is a reduction of unnecessary pesticides in human environments.

I am not suggesting a cookie cutter approach to pest control; every condominium environment is different and a competent pest control professional will custom design a program to fit your needs. I do want to point out that trends and technology change, and one should constantly re-evaluate how things are done.

Mistake #5: Not doing proper due diligence before signing the contract

Ok, you've done your homework, before signing on the dotted line check the following:

- ✓ You have received all of your requirements outlined in #3 in writing.
- ✓ Ask for references on similar properties serviced by the same technician close by. Then actually call them!
- ✓ Read the contract thoroughly; it should be simple and contain an "out clause" for poor service. I would caution against long wordy contracts with lots of small print.

In closing, spending a small amount of time in the hiring process of your pest control vendor can reduce stress, save you time and money in the long run.

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