
Pest Control Workers

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Significant Points

- A high school diploma is the minimum educational requirement; however, about 4 in 10 workers
- have either attended college or earned a degree.
- Laws require pest control workers to be certified through training and examination.
- Job prospects should be favorable, especially in warmer climates.

Nature of the Work

Unwanted creatures that infest households, buildings, or surrounding areas are pests that can pose serious risks to health and safety. The most common pests are roaches, rats, mice, spiders, termites, fleas, ants, and bees. It is a pest control worker's job to remove them.

Pest control workers locate, identify, destroy, control, and repel pests. They use their knowledge of pests' biology and habits, along with an arsenal of pest management techniques such as applying chemicals, setting traps, operating equipment, and even modifying structures to alleviate pest problems. The final choice of which type of pest management is used often is decided by the consumer.

After a pest management plan is agreed upon, action needs to be taken. Some pests need to be eliminated and require pesticide application. Pest control workers use two different types of pesticides—general use and restricted use. General use pesticides are the most widely used and are readily available. They are available to the public in diluted concentrations. Restricted use pesticides are available only to certified professionals for controlling the most severe infestations. Their registration, labeling, and application are regulated by Federal law and interpreted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), because of their potential harm to pest control workers, customers, and the environment.

Pesticides are not pest control workers' only tool. Pest control workers increasingly use a combination of pest management techniques, known as integrated pest management. One method involves using proper sanitation and creating physical barriers. Pests cannot survive without food and will not infest a building if they cannot enter it. Another method involves using baits, some of which destroy the pests and others that prevent them from reproducing. Yet another method involves using mechanical devices, such as traps, that remove pests from the immediate environment.

Integrated pest management is popular for several reasons. Pesticides can pose environmental and health risks and some States heavily restrict the application of pesticides. Some pests are becoming more resistant to pesticides in certain situations. Finally, an integrated pest management plan is more effective in the long term than use of a pesticide alone.

New technology has been introduced that allows pest control workers to conduct home inspections, mainly of termites, in much less time. The technology works by implanting microchips in baiting stations, which emit signals that can tell pest

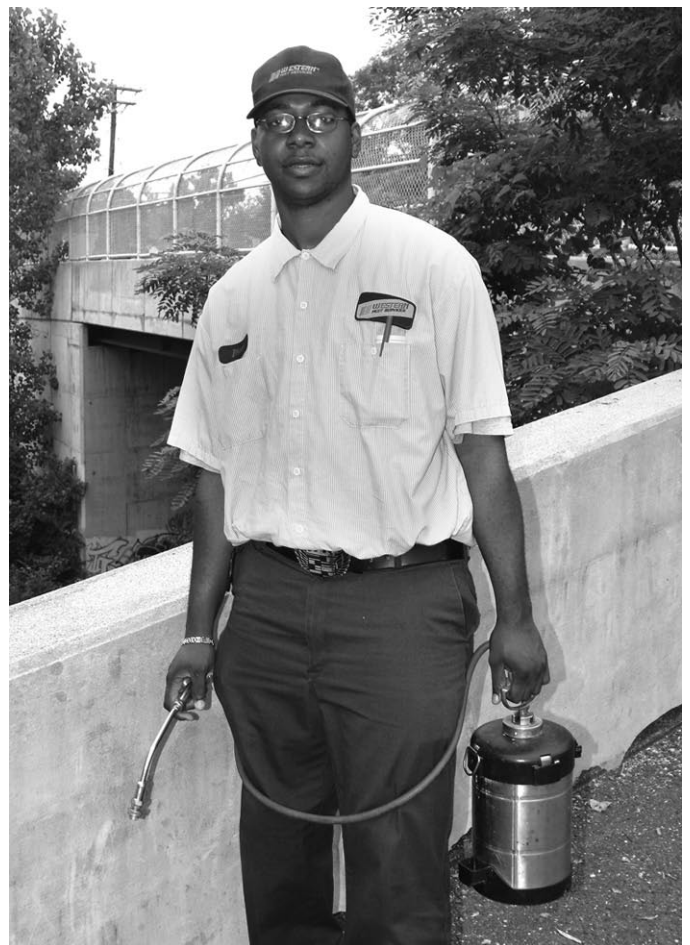
control workers if there is termite activity at one of the baiting stations. Workers pick up the signals using a device similar to a metal detector and it allows them to more quickly assess the presence of termites.

Most pest control workers are employed as pest control technicians, applicators, or supervisors. Position titles vary by State, but the hierarchy—based on the training and responsibility required—remains consistent.

Pest control technicians identify potential pest problems, conduct inspections, and design control strategies. They work directly with the customer. Some technicians require a higher level of training depending on their task. If certain products are used, the technician may be required to become a certified applicator.

Applicators that specialize in controlling termites are called termite control technicians. They use chemicals and modify structures to eliminate termites and prevent future infestation. To treat infested areas, termite control technicians drill holes and cut openings into buildings to access infestations and install physical barriers or bait systems around the structure. Some termite control technicians even repair structural damage caused by termites.

Fumigators are applicators who control pests using poisonous gases called fumigants. Fumigators pretreat infested buildings by examining, measuring, and sealing the buildings. Then, using cylinders, hoses, and valves, they fill structures with the proper amount and concentration of fumigant. They also monitor the premises during treatment for leaking gas. To prevent



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accidental fumigant exposure, fumigators padlock doors and post warning signs.

Pest control supervisors, also known as *operators*, direct service technicians and certified applicators. Supervisors are licensed to apply pesticides, but they usually are more involved in running the business. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that employees obey rules regarding pesticide use, and they must resolve any problems that arise with regulatory officials or customers. Most States require each pest control establishment to have a supervisor. Self-employed business owners usually are supervisors.

Work environment. Pest control workers travel to visit clients. Pest control workers must kneel, bend, reach, and crawl to inspect, modify, and treat structures. They work both indoors and out, in all weather conditions. During warm weather, applicators may be uncomfortable wearing the heavy protective gear; such as respirators, gloves, and goggles that are required for working with pesticides.

There are health risks associated with pesticide use. Various pest control chemicals are toxic and could be harmful if not used properly. Health risks are minimized, however, by the extensive training required for certification and the use of recommended protective equipment, resulting in fewer reported cases of lost work.

About 47 percent of all pest control workers work a 40-hour week, but 26 percent work more hours. Pest control workers often work evenings and weekends, but many work consistent shifts.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Both Federal and State laws require pest control workers to be certified. Although a high school diploma is generally the minimum educational requirement, about 4 in 10 pest control workers have either attended college or earned a degree. Most pest control workers begin their careers as apprentice technicians.

Education and training. A high school diploma or equivalent is the minimum qualification for most pest control jobs. Pest control workers must have the basic knowledge needed to pass certification tests. In many States, training usually involves spending 10 hours in the classroom and 60 hours on the job for each category of work that the pest control worker would like to perform. Categories may include general pest control, rodent control, termite control, fumigation, and ornamental and turf control. In addition, technicians must attend general training in pesticide safety and use. After completing the required training, workers can provide supervised pest control services.

Pest control workers usually begin their careers as apprentice technicians. They receive both formal classroom and on-the-job training provided by the employer, but they also must study on their own. Because pest control methods change, workers must attend continuing education classes to maintain their certification, often provided by product manufacturers.

Licensure and certification. Both Federal and State laws regulate pest control workers. These laws require them to be certified through training and examination. Most pest control firms provide training and help their employees prepare for the examination. Requirements for pest control workers vary by State. To be eligible to become applicators, technicians must

have a combination of experience and education and pass a test. This requirement is sometimes waived for individuals who have either a college degree in biological sciences or extensive related work experience. To become certified as applicators, technicians must pass an additional set of category exams. Depending on the State, applicators must attend additional classes every 1 to 6 years to be recertified. The amount of time allowed to pass the basic certification depends on the State.

Other qualifications. Because of the extensive interaction that pest control workers have with their customers, employers prefer to hire people who have good communication and interpersonal skills. In addition, most pest control companies require their employees to have a good driving record. Some states require a background check for workers prior to certification. Pest control workers must be in good health because of the physical demands of the job, and they also must be able to withstand extreme conditions—such as the heat of climbing into an attic in the summertime or the chill of sliding into a crawlspace during winter.

Advancement. Applicators with several years of experience often become supervisors. To qualify as a pest control supervisor, applicators may have to pass State-administered exams and have relevant experience, usually a minimum of 2 years. Others may choose to take the knowledge and experience that they have gained, and start their own pest management company.

Employment

Pest control workers held about 70,000 jobs in 2006; about 85 percent of workers were employed in the services to buildings and dwellings industry, which includes pest control firms. About 9 percent of workers were self employed. Jobs are concentrated in States with warmer climates and larger cities, due to the greater number of pests in these areas that thrive year round.

Job Outlook

With faster-than-average growth and a limited supply of workers, job prospects should be favorable, especially in warmer climates.

Employment change. Employment of pest control workers is expected to grow 15 percent between 2006 and 2016, which is faster than the average for all occupations. One factor limiting job growth, however, is the lack of sufficient numbers of workers willing to go into this field. Demand for pest control workers is projected to increase for a number of reasons. Growth in the population will generate new residential and commercial buildings that will require inspections by pest control workers. Also, more people are expected to use pest control services as environmental and health concerns, greater numbers of dual-income households, and improvements in the standard of living convince more people to hire professionals rather than attempt pest control work themselves. In addition, tougher regulations limiting pesticide use will demand more complex integrated pest management strategies.

Concerns about the effects of pesticide use in schools have increasingly prompted more school districts to investigate alternative means of pest control, such as integrated pest management. Furthermore, use of some newer materials for insulation around foundations has made many homes more susceptible

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-16	
				Number	Percent
Pest control workers.....	37-2021	70,000	81,000	11,000	15

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

to pest infestation. Finally, continuing population shifts to the more pest-prone Sunbelt States should increase the number of households in need of pest control.

Job prospects. Job prospects should be favorable for qualified applicants because of relatively fast job growth and because the nature of pest control work is not appealing to many people. In addition to job openings arising from employment growth, opportunities will result from the need to replace workers who leave the occupation.

Earnings

Median hourly earnings of full-time wage and salary pest control workers were \$13.41 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$10.79 and \$16.76. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$8.88, and the top 10 percent earned over \$20.85. Pest control supervisors usually earn the most and technicians the least, with earnings of certified applicators falling somewhere in between. Some pest control workers earn commissions based on the number of contracts for pest control services they sell. Others may earn bonuses for exceeding performance goals.

Related Occupations

Pest control workers visit homes and places of business to provide building services. Other workers who provide services to buildings include building cleaning workers; grounds maintenance workers; various construction trades workers, such as carpenters and hazardous materials removal workers; and heating, air-conditioning, and refrigeration mechanics and installers. Similar to pest control workers, pesticide handlers, sprayers, and applicators, vegetation also apply pesticides in a safe manner to lawns, trees, and other plants.

Sources of Additional Information

Private employment agencies and State employment services offices have information about available job opportunities for pest control workers.

For information about the training and certification required in your State, contact your local office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture or your State's Environmental Protection (or Conservation) Agency.

For more information about pest control careers and training, contact:

► National Pest Management Association, Suite 301, 9300 Lee Hgwy., Fairfax, VA 22031.

Internet: <http://www.npmapestworld.org/PTPP/>