

Expert opinion

Employee Training and Managing Customer Expectations: Your First Line of Defense Against Claims

By John Culotta



As a Pest Management Professional, the last thing you want is a dissatisfied customer claiming your work was negligent or did not live up to their expectations. But too often we see claims by customers who did not understand either the risks or probable outcome of their treatment.

Your first line of defense against such claims is twofold: managing customer expectations and effective employee training.

Managing Expectations

Managing expectations is a theme I emphasize regularly in this column. It's important to talk with your customer and be sure they understand both the risks and chances for success of your treatment.

Even if you have proper wording in your contract, you need to walk through the details in person:

- Let your customers know what to expect when they arrive back to their home after the treatment process.
- If multiple treatments are a possibility, especially when treating bed bugs, discuss this in advance with customers so they will not be surprised.
- Set realistic expectations so you are not held accountable if a customer delays your ability to come back for follow-up treatments.

Employee Training

A second theme I emphasize is employee training. One of the important parts of training is the treatment, including proper chemical mixtures, application amounts and the appropriate use of equipment. As you know, mistakes can lead to costly re-treatments, property damage and even bodily injury. Make sure both experienced professionals and rookies are trained to meet your technical standards.

Don't stop your training at the technical level. Training should also cover professionalism and communications so your employees learn how they can manage customer expectations as described above. Having rules for communications is one thing, but being able to effectively communicate is another.

Offer refresher courses so you are keeping up with emerging problems and new techniques. With both online and live training, there are many external resources. The [National Pest Management Association](#) also offers educational opportunities at national and regional events.

You can never prevent all customer complaints or claims, but by paying

attention to both managing customer expectations and technical and communications training, you can avoid many preventable and costly problems.

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From the *PMP* archives: More insurance tips

Four ways to prevent termite claims

While bed bugs are getting all the attention as the source of many claims against PMPs, termites remain a big part of most pest control businesses, demanding attention to avoid costly claims ... not all of which might be covered by your insurance policy.

Use downtime to improve safety

Got free time? Use it wisely and take this opportunity to look at your internal safety programs, and implement proactive steps to reduce costly insurance claims.

Three steps to effective contracts

Before you get too preoccupied with those looming termite calls, it's important to examine your contracts, as well as related processes and communications.



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