

Clemson University
Department of Pesticide Regulation

What to Do When the Stick Turns Blue: Pest Control and Pregnancy

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Department of
Pesticide Regulation

511 Westinghouse Road

Pendleton, SC 29670

864.646.2150

<http://dpr.clemson.edu>

Administration

Dr. Neil J. Ogg
Director of Regulatory and
Public Service Programs

Dr. David S. Howle
Assistant Director of
Regulatory and Public
Service Programs

Dr. Joseph P. Krausz
Department Head, DPR

Cam Lay
Assistant Department
Head, DPR

Dr. Tim Drake
State Programs Manager,
DPR

Jim Wright
Regulatory Supervisor,
DPR

Bulletin 27

A Guide for Applicators and Homeowners

First of all, if you're an expectant family, the Department of Pesticide Regulation congratulates you on your good news and your upcoming bundle of joy! You've ordered the books, the blankets, and the bottles, but what do you do about pest control during pregnancy and/or if you have small children in your home? This Bulletin will give you all you need, if you can find the spare time to sit down and read it! We get several questions each month from pest control operators and expectant parents or parents with newborn and small children. This is a very sensitive and important issue, and it is one that all pest control professionals must be prepared to discuss with customers—and customers need to be prepared to discuss with their pest control company. As with most sensitive issues, it is much better to have the answer before the issue presents itself.

The time for expectant parents or pest control professionals to inquire about the presence of young children in the home is before any pest control program is begun. Also, pest control professionals should be aware that it is increasingly common these days for people to provide day care services in their homes throughout the day, so small children might be in the home for several hours at a time even though they might not actually live there.

If you are a pest control professional, please be sure that you determine whether or not a pregnancy is involved or if there are any newborn children in the household. Bear in mind that some pregnant women, even up into the last trimester, may not "appear" to be pregnant. This should be on your list of "standard questions." You don't want to find that out after you have just treated a customer's carpets or put hundreds of gallons of termiticide under their house.

The best advice that the Department of Pesticide Regulation can give you if you are worried about the effect that a pesticide treatment will have on his or her health, pregnancy, or children is for you to check with your physician. The Agromedicine Program at the Medical University of South Carolina provides physicians with information related to pesticides and pesticide exposure. They can be reached at 843.792.2281, or you may visit their website at <http://www.musc.edu/oem/agmedhome.html>.

If you are an applicator, provide your customer with a copy of the pesticide's label and the MSDS (material safety data sheet). If you do not have an MSDS sheet on hand, be sure to send your customer one from your office. **Above all, do not treat the property unless and until the customer's concerns have been sufficiently addressed by their physician.** The few dollars you will make will not begin to make up for the cost and trouble of trying to undo it later. If your customer decides to have the treatment performed after discussing things with their physician, it may be prudent for you to obtain some documentation of the fact that you have discussed with them (and they have discussed it with their physician) and decided to proceed.

We understand that a child's life and health is of the utmost concern and importance. Unfortunately, no matter how healthy an expectant mother is, genetic disorders inevitably affect a certain small fraction of babies and children, and complications during delivery affect a few more. Even very healthy babies and small children are notoriously prone to colds, fevers, "colic," and other illnesses. If you are an applicator, please note that we have seen pest control professionals be held accountable for nothing more than a serious cold coinciding with their treatments.

We have also seen enormous settlements made over unproven claims that a miscarriage, birth defect, or permanent disability from illness was caused by a pesticide application. This is why it is imperative that all information has been discussed with the customer—and that the customer has discussed all concerns with their physician. Part of being in a service business, particularly one as competitive as pest control, depends on demonstrating to your customers that you are an informed, alert, and concerned professional. As the source of your livelihood and the keepers of your professional reputation, they expect and deserve no less. And remember, word-of-mouth advertising is about the best advertising there is.

In many cases, there are alternative treatments for both termites and general pest control that are less obtrusive, produce less odor, or do not involve applying pesticides inside the structure, but they still provide an acceptable level of control. Perimeter treatments and bait applications for pest control and the use of no-odor borate products and bait systems for termites are two immediate examples. Differences in the degree of control these measures may provide and the need for follow-up conventional treatments should be addressed in the contract. For subterranean termite treatments, it may also be necessary to obtain an Official Waiver of Standards Form.

To download the Official Waiver of Standards Form, go to <http://dpr.clemson.edu/Forms/Pdfforms/Official%20Waiver.pdf>.

For information on how to use this form, see Bulletin 20, "Proper Use of the Official Waiver of Standards Form" at <http://dpr.clemson.edu/acrobat/bulletin%2020%20How%20to%20Fill%20Out%20Waiver4.pdf>.

Checklist for Hiring a Pest Control Company

- ___ Get several bids from different pest control companies.
- ___ Ask the company for references and check them out. Ask friends and neighbors to recommend a firm.
- ___ Get a termite contract. Contracts are usually written for a specified number of years. The most useful cover damage, namely treatment and repair.
- ___ Ask how long the contract will be in effect and that kind of coverage you have.
- ___ Have your house inspected regularly for termites.
- ___ A licensed company must place its yellow pesticide sticker (in the shape of the State of South Carolina), company name, business license number, and location on company trucks.
- ___ To learn whether a firm is licensed, call the Clemson University Department of Pesticide Regulation at 864.646.2150.
- ___ Call the Department of Pesticide Regulation to learn whether a company has a history of violations or to file a complaint.