

ANSWERING CUSTOMER'S QUESTIONS ABOUT PESTICIDES

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Today's well-informed public expects the person hired to manage their property to answer their questions truthfully and professionally. It's important that you never underestimate the importance of a question; every question asked is important to the person who is asking, and that person deserves the best answer that you can possibly provide. As a guest on your clients' property, your ability to respond knowledgeably to questions is reassuring; it gives them a sense of confidence in your technical abilities.

Answering questions is at first a difficult proposition: Expect to be stumped! Even the most seasoned professional cannot spontaneously answer every question asked; but as you become more knowledgeable in your profession, handling questions will become easier.

KEY STEPS IN DEALING WITH THE PUBLIC'S QUESTIONS

Let the customer finish the question. Give customers the opportunity to ask their entire question *without interruption*. This is important because often the *real* question doesn't emerge until the very end. Interrupting conveys defensiveness and can jeopardize customers' trust in you; and besides, waiting also allows you more time to think about the question.

Keep It simple, stupid! Simplicity is best when answering questions. Always be aware that your customers don't really care how much you know. If they really cared to know all there is to know about it, they'd study it themselves and manage their own property! All they want are answers to their specific questions; keep them short-and-to-the-point.

Use everyday language—words that come natural to you. Know how to communicate with customers. Don't use unfamiliar jargon and scientific words that they may not grasp. There are no perfect scripts or how-to steps in answering clients' questions, but it is important that *you* feel comfortable with what you tell the *customer*. Using your own words and examples will go a long way in gaining—and maintaining—their confidence in you as a professional.

Never admit guilt. Never admit that you did something wrong because you are not always in the best position to make that determination. Collect the information from the customer and tell them you or your supervisor will get back in contact with them. If you admit guilt, then no matter what other facts are collected, you are still guilty because that's what you told your customer.

Always be honest and open. There's no doubt that being honest and open is a great attribute. Customers appreciate sincerity, and there's no better tool for establishing trust.

Be polite. Courtesy helps your customers feel more relaxed. Make eye contact when answering their questions, and always treat them with respect.

Never answer questions about your customers. You should always respect the confidentiality of your customers. If the person answering the question wants that information, they need to contact those persons directly.

Know your limits. When you're really out on a limb and get that sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach, don't hesitate to tell customers that you'll need to do some checking to answer their question. Sometimes a quick call to the office will do the trick, and sometimes you may have to get back to the customer at a later time. Either way, it is more important to provide a correct answer than a quick one.

Achieve a 100% follow-up. Always write down in a dedicated notebook the customer's name and phone number, the date, and the question they asked that still needs answering. Call them back that day or the next day, at the latest.

When You Don't Know the Answer

Do your homework. Research the question and be proud when you call your customer back with the best answer you could find. Sometimes it might be desirable to provide the customer with a reliable source of additional information. Customers expect and appreciate a personal touch.

Why You Should Care

Gaining as much knowledge as possible enables you to answer most questions on-the-spot. Honest, credible answers to certain questions, however, may require some research and personal effort. But the end result is that you will feel good about providing the right answer—and your credibility as a professional will be firmly established.

Take Home Message

Employees should be encouraged to bring in tough-to-answer questions posed by their customers. Answering them during internal training programs will allow both the rookies and the veterans to improve their question-answering skills.