

How to Become a Pest Control Operator in the Lawn and Ornamental Category

Many lawn care company owners, and others who want to operate a lawn care business, want to become certified to provide a complete service of pesticide applications to their customers' landscape including the grass or turf. The only people that can legally apply pesticides to turf associated with structures are Pest Control Operators (PCO) that have a lawn and ornamental pest control license and service employees working under their direct supervision. Homeowners are exempt from needing certification.

Chapter 482 Florida Statutes (F.S.), also known as the Structural Pest Control Act, is the law that specifies the requirements for those that apply pesticides in, on, or near structures in Florida. An individual is not allowed to take the exam until several qualifications are met. This is the main obstacle to most seeking certification.



S. Priest, formerly UF/IFAS

Qualifying

These 4 qualifications must be met by all applicants:

- must have graduated from high school or have evidence of an equivalent education
- must be at least 18 years of age when the application for the exam is completed
- If you are a convicted felon, do not apply for any exams until you have proof that your civil rights have been restored.
- must have the required work experience

To qualify to take an exam one must have work experience in the lawn and ornamental category. There are 3 ways to get this experience. You can attend a course designed specifically for this purpose, have certain higher education courses and work for a PCO, or just work for a PCO. The amount of work experience may vary depending on the education one might have.

Landscape maintenance companies are not allowed to make any application of pesticides to the turf, this includes weed and feed products. PCOs can make pesticide applications to turf.

Following are the requirements as spelled out in the Florida Statutes.

482.132 F.S.

(2) Each applicant for examination for a pest control operator's certificate must possess the minimum qualifications specified in one of the following paragraphs:

(a) Three years employment as a service employee of a licensee that performs pest control in the category or categories in which the applicant seeks certification, 1 year of which employment must have been completed in this state during the year immediately preceding application for examination.

(b) A degree with advanced training or a major in entomology, botany, agronomy, or horticulture from a recognized college or university, which training or major included the completion of at least 20 semester hours or 30 quarter hours of college credits in those subjects, plus 1 year of employment as a service employee of a licensee that performs pest control in the category or categories in which the applicant seeks certification or the successful completion of a 1-year entomology program at a public university in this state which specializes in urban pest management and includes practical pest management experience. If such advanced training or major is in entomology, the applicant is qualified for examination in all categories; but if such advanced training or major is in botany, agronomy, or horticulture, the applicant is qualified for examination only in the category of lawn and ornamental pest control.

(c) A 2-year degree in horticultural technology or the equivalent from a college or university, with advanced training of 20 or more semester hours or 30 or more quarter hours of credit in horticulture, plus 1 year of employment as a service employee of a licensee that performs pest control only in the category of lawn and ornamental pest control. Such an applicant is qualified for examination only in the category of lawn and ornamental pest control.

(d) A 2-year degree in general pest control technology or the equivalent from a college or university, with advanced training of 20 or more semester hours or 30 or more quarter hours of credit in entomology, plus 1 year of employment as a service employee of a licensee that performs pest control in any category or categories. Such an applicant is qualified for all examinations.

(e) Twenty-four semester hours or 36 quarter hours of courses in entomology, pest control technology, and related subjects, plus 1 year of employment as a service employee of a licensee that performs pest control in the category of general household pest, termite, and fumigation. Such an applicant is qualified only for examination in the categories of general household pest control, termite and other wood-destroying organisms pest control, and fumigation.

(f) Twenty-four semester hours or 36 quarter hours of courses in entomology, pest control technology, agronomy, botany, horticulture, and related subjects, plus 1 year of employment as a service employee of a licensee that performs pest control in the category of lawn and ornamental pest control. Such an applicant is qualified only for examination in the category of lawn and ornamental pest control.

(g) Three years full-time employment as a service employee of the United States Department of Defense, who has been certified to perform pest control in the category or categories in which the applicant seeks certification, 1 year of which employment must have been completed in this state during the year immediately preceding application for examination. Additionally, the application for certification must be submitted to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services within 12 months after the date of termination of employment from the Department of Defense.

During this work experience, the employee will be an identification card holder under the supervision of the PCO, and will need to have made 45 supervised applications in order to meet the qualifications.

After Qualifying

It is never too early to start studying for the exam, so get the materials and start now.

Once qualified to take an exam, an examinee must have the knowledge to pass the exam. There is a \$300 fee each time an exam is administered. There are suggested study materials for all exams.

These study materials are the same for all four PCO categories:

Chapter 482 F.S. available at <http://www.flsenate.gov/Laws/Statutes/2012/Chapter482/All>

Chapter 5E-14, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.) available at

<https://www.flrules.org/gateway/ChapterHome.asp?Chapter=5e-14>

Applying Pesticides Correctly, available in two formats, SM 1 or SM 69,

at <http://ifasbooks.ifas.ufl.edu/c-76-pesticides-exam-study-materials.aspx>

For the lawn and ornamental category these **additional** materials are needed for study:

Ornamental & Turfgrass Pest Management, available in two formats, SM 7 or SM 74, at <http://ifasbooks.ifas.ufl.edu/c-76-pesticides-exam-study-materials.aspx?pagenum=2>

Florida Lawn Handbook, available at <http://ifasbooks.ifas.ufl.edu/p-139-florida-lawn-handbook-best-management-practices-for-your-home-lawn-in-florida-third-edition.aspx>

Imported Fire Ants On Lawns, available at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH059#FIGURE%201>

Florida Green Industries Best Management Practices for Protection of Water Resources in Florida, available at http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/gibmp_manual_web_2_17_11.pdf

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services now allows web-based testing for the PCO exams. An examinee will be given exam results as soon as the exam is completed. These exams are administered in our Palm Beach County offices.

You will have to apply to take the exam when you have met the qualifications and finished studying. Here is the link to the application packet <http://www.freshfromflorida.com/content/download/3556/22257/exmpckt.pdf> . For signing up to use the computer exams use this link <https://pesticideexam.ifas.ufl.edu/> .

For more information on traditional paper exam times, categories, and application deadline dates please see <http://www.freshfromflorida.com/Divisions-Offices/Agricultural-Environmental-Services/Business-Services/Pest-Control/Exam-Schedule-and-Information> .

Call our office if you need help.

Homeowners

Individual homeowners are exempt from certification and can apply any non-restricted use pesticide, that is labeled for home use, on his or her own property. These products have a federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) label that must be read and accurately followed for the application to be legal and safe. A homeowner also has the right to have their yard worker make the applications. The yard worker must not provide the equipment or chemicals, advertise, or make any claims that he or she is in the pest control business. Yard workers are limited to handheld equipment only. See section 482.211 (11) of chapter 482 F.S. for more information on the yard worker exemption <http://www.flsenate.gov/Laws/Statutes/2010/482.211> .

**Palm Beach County Cooperative Extension Service
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*For more information on pesticides, training calendars,
and exams, contact:*

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<http://www.pbcgov.com/coextension/agriculture/safety/>

Homeowners are exempt from certification. Federal law requires that they read and follow all pesticide label directions. Homeowners should never use a pesticide in or around their home that is not labeled for home use.