



10 Guidelines to Hiring the Right Indoor Environmental Contractor

As a manager of commercial real estate or a building owner, you may need the services of a specialized contractor for various indoor environmental projects. You may have encountered a fire or smoke issue, a water issue (leak or flood), an odor issue or a microbial issue. An Indoor Air Quality Assessment may be needed which could lead to a mold remediation and/or the decontamination of the HVAC system. These situations require a specialized IEQ contractor, not just a general contractor, plumber, or janitorial contractor.

The decision of who to hire from so many different trades that say they are certified for this type of work can be confusing. It is critical to select the proper contractor in order to resolve the current issue, prevent future issues, reduce down time, control cost and minimize risk and liability.

Where do you find a quality Indoor Environmental contractor? How do you get started on your restoration path? You can search the internet, check the yellow pages, check association memberships or contact someone for a recommendation. Prior to starting the search, below is a ten (10) step guideline to consider while searching for the proper specialized contractor.

One – Commercial vs. Residential

The contractor's primary focus and the major portion of the work portfolio should be in the commercial sector. The commercial arena varies greatly from the residential arena – the work environment is completely different. Commercial real estate is constructed under the commercial building code. The contractor should have experience working with the various commercial building structures (building envelopes, roofs, HVAC and plumbing systems).

Some of the differences in the commercial environment are: work areas and equipment are larger and in many cases more technical that requiring a high level of expertise to complete tasks, confidential areas, sensitive electronics, specialty equipment, and multiple work areas. Within a commercial building the number of people affected by an IEQ issue can range from one to hundreds. The contractor must be able to work with corporate structures, procedures and protocols. Selecting a contractor that is experienced and qualified to function in the commercial arena and whose commercial workload well outweighs its residential workload.

Two – Type of Project

The type and size of the project should be taken into consideration in the contractor selection process. A contractor may be qualified for a particular project type that may not necessarily meet your needs. A scope of work will narrow and drive your search efforts. Please note, being certified in a particular type of work does not mean qualified and experienced to perform the work task. A water restoration contractor may not be qualified or experienced in the decontamination of an HVAC system, even if they have taken a three day certification in this field.

The size of the project is another key factor in the selecting the contractor. This may include the physical work area, multiple phases or possibly multiple vendors. The proper contractor should be experienced

performing the job size that you need, working in phases and working with multiple vendors. Ensure that the contractor has adequate in-house staffing not temporary labor. Temporary labor may be adequate for some trades but not for this type of specialized work. The contractor should have a successful track record meeting time tables based on this size project. Be careful of “No Job to Small or No Job to Big”

Three - Equipment, Technology & Services

Equipment, technology and services are essential in completing an indoor environment issue. The questions to be asked are:

- Does the contractor own or rent the equipment for the project?
- If equipment is owned, what is the quality of equipment?
- Does the contractor have enough equipment to meet the size of the job?
- Does the contractor have the knowledge to properly operate the equipment?
- Has the equipment been serviced and maintained?
- Does the equipment meet current technology standards?
- Is the contractor providing services that are specified for the type of work and meet health and safety requirements?

While owning equipment is a significant investment, it is an indicator that a contractor is serious about their business. It also demonstrates the contractor’s ability to control all aspects of the servicing your project. Timing is important in resolving indoor environmental issues. If a contractor has to rent equipment, work with poorly maintained equipment, attempt to work with the wrong equipment for the task and/or work with ineffective services the project is set up for failure.

Four – Staffing

Another indicator of a quality contractor is if they are self-performing; this means that they use their own labor force on a job. This is especially important with particularly critical and/or sensitive portions of a job that require expertise and special training. The contractor’s staff should function as a team – their efforts will take advantage of the strengths of each employee. The team will have an efficient work flow thus assuring quality work along with the task being performed on a timely basis.

When selecting a contractor, the number of in-house employees is important. A self-performing contractor has invested time and money in vetting their employees, and training them for the special situations within the indoor environmental industry. The staff should be trained and experienced in the work task, the project protocols, the operation of equipment and the health and safety component the project.

Self-performing companies can provide added value to a project. Scheduling, performance and pricing are all impacted by staffing. Many projects are governed by man hours to complete the task at hand. A contractor with the proper supporting staff will be able to meet or improve scheduling, perform effectively and control the cost of a project.

Five – Insurance

In the selection process the indoor environmental contractor should provide, five (5) to six (6) types of insurance coverage:

- General Liability
- Contractors Pollution Liability (CPL)
- Workers Compensation
- Errors & Omission Insurance (E&O)
- Automobile Liability
- Third Party Theft

The coverage limits of the policies should meet your required levels. The contractor should be willing to provide a current Certificate of Insurance (COI) listing you or your company as a co-insured.

Industry standards normally require General Liability, Auto Liability and Workers Compensation. A common **oversight** in the selection of a qualified vendor for indoor environmental issues is insurance coverage. General Liability coverage **excludes** various aspects required to properly perform indoor environmental projects.

The indoor environmental contractor should be aware of these exclusions and be able to provide CPL coverage along with E&O. The contractor's insurance provides protection for the building, the building manager and the building owner. If a contractor performs any work involving mold their General Liability and Workers Compensation is automatically **voided** unless they carry CPL insurance. A contractor should never be allowed on a job site without the proper insurance coverage and limits.

Six – Scope of Work

A scope of work should be established prior to the selection of a contractor. This is the document that describes the task(s) to be performed, timing of the project, standards, procedures and protocols of the project. The scope of work can be developed by the building manager, the building owner, a third party or the contractor.

The scope of work will be the road map to the project. It should be clear, complete and logical enough to be understood by those who will administer the project. The scope of work should establish the protocol in the event there are unforeseen aspects to the indoor environmental project. You should be aware of the contractor's policy as it relates to the changes in the scope of work. The scope should include specific steps in order for contractor pricing to be prepared apples to apples.

Seven – Final Report at Completion of Project

An indoor environmental project is not complete until final reporting is provided. The final report should document the work performed from start to finish. When hiring an environmental contractor, an excellent way to familiarize with their reporting style is to request a sample report of a similar job they have completed. A sample report will provide a realistic idea of how conclusive the report will be and if it will meet your requirements. Photos of the entire process should be a mandatory part of the final report; photos will document the procedures followed during each step of the process. The final report will become a permanent record of the resolution to the indoor environmental issue. Should questions arise at a later date surrounding the indoor environmental issue the final report will be one of the documents of record.

Eight – Fee Structure

If you are conducting a Request for Proposal(RFP) or bid process, make sure you are comparing “apples to apples”; if you are just hiring a contractor understanding the fee structure is crucial. Fee structures vary throughout the industry. The contractors should be willing and able to provide detail of their fee structure. Some contractors will provide a concrete price and some will provide a base price plus. A contractor may charge a rental fee for equipment used on a job. This process can leave the final fee open ended. Contractors’ fee structures may vary based on the procedure or protocol used to perform the job.

The fee structures can vary based on the timing of the job. One contractor may bill overtime rates for work performed after 5 p.m. during the week and on weekends. Another may bill regular rates for nights and weekends. Materials in some cases are a function of labor cost on a job. Materials can all be passed through at cost or cost plus.

Make sure you are getting what you are paying for and definitely have an understanding what your fee is comprised of. A comparison of each contractor’s man hours in the fee structure will flag if a contractor has allotted enough man power to complete the job correctly.

Nine – References

It is a good practice to check reference in the selection of a contractor. Even if a contractor has come highly recommended by a peer or colleague, additional reference checks should be conducted. The contractor should be willing to provide reputable references based on jobs similar to your project and industry. There are a variety of other areas to verify references:

- The Better Business Bureau
- Dun & Bradstreet
- IICRC
- Professional Associations

Ten – Prequalify

In many of the situations associated with indoor environmental issues, time is of the essence. The lack of time often controls the contractor selection process. Prequalifying a contractor allows you to select a contractor without the pressure of a situation needing an immediate response.

Take the time to create important relationships prior to an event to ensure you can respond quickly to an emergency. Contractors can be properly vetted therefore reducing response time and completing projects without surprises. You will have time to conduct the nine (9) guidelines above. Visit the contractor's office and warehouse to better understand their capabilities, see their equipment and operational facility. This is an important function that will bypass the smoke and mirrors presentation given by salesmen and marketing teams. Seeing how a company maintains their facility and equipment will give you a good insight on how they will perform on your job. One of the most important things received during this process will be a better understanding of the indoor environmental industry.

GET TO KNOW THEM BEFORE YOU NEED THEM