

SELECTING AN ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANT

Welcome to DEQ's Environmental Cleanup Program. This fact sheet offers some tips on how to choose an environmental consultant.

Asking questions and checking references is essential. A competent consultant will help you define the problem and develop solutions that are protective, in compliance with environmental regulations, and cost effective.

Your consulting team should have:

- A thorough understanding of Oregon's environmental cleanup law and rules.
- Experience in projects that are similar to yours in scope and nature.
- Excellent communication skills, both verbal and written.

Where to Begin

Compile all the information you can about the property, including the history of operations at the site, potential sources of contamination, and company records on where and how hazardous substances have been used and/or stored. Prepare a brief, written description of the site, including current use and the work you think needs to be done. Providing as much information as you can will enable consulting firms to give you more accurate estimates. This can save you time and money. While DEQ cannot recommend specific consultants, we can give you references from other cleanup projects.

The firm you select needs to demonstrate not only that it is capable, but that it will have qualified staff available at the time you want the work done. Ask the consulting firm to

estimate the time needed to complete the work required and how they might phase the work to fit your budget and your plans for the site. Keep in mind that environmental investigations often turn up new information that may change the scope.

Questions to Ask Prospective Consultants

- Names of companies they worked for in the past, and how similar the projects are to yours.
- How much work was subcontracted and who were those subcontractors? Would they use them again?
- Did they encounter unexpected delays or staff turnover? How was this handled?
- Was the project completed on time and within budget?
- What is their experience in working with DEQ or other regulators?
- What potential impact will the cleanup have on customers, neighbors or traffic?

Check References!

Checking references is probably the most important part of the selection process. Before choosing a consulting firm, it is critical to talk with businesses the firm cites as references. Some questions you may want to ask include:

- Were you satisfied with your consultant's work?
- Did you have any concerns about the firm's performance or fees?
- What specific staff members were on your team?



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- Was your project completed on time and within budget?
- Did you encounter any unexpected delays or staff turnover? If so, were these handled to your satisfaction?
- Did the firm have to “re-do” any part of your project because it wasn’t done adequately the first time?

Last Step: Request Proposals

Ask for proposals from firms or individuals that seem to best meet your needs. Proposals should include a scope of work, staff resumes, estimated work schedules, anticipated costs and related fees, estimated total project costs with an itemized fee schedule, and references. Make sure the estimated work schedule also includes time for DEQ review and approval. Here are some things to look out for in reviewing proposals:

- Bids that are significantly lower than those of competing firms.
- “Hard sell” approaches.
- Minimizing or maximizing potential technical or legal problems.
- Strong biases against certain investigation techniques or cleanup alternatives.
- Conflicts of interest, and
- Overly optimistic timelines.

Interviewing prospective consultants, checking their references, and reviewing the proposals will help you make an informed decision about which consultant to hire for your project.

Alternative formats

Alternative formats of this document can be made available. Contact DEQ’s Office of Communications and Outreach, Portland, for more information at (503) 229-5317.