



ROOFING THE RIGHT WAY: HOW TO SELECT A COMMERCIAL ROOF CONTRACTOR

Your roof is your business' first line of defense against natural hazards...and it's also the most vulnerable part of your building. Roofs are repeatedly exposed to weather and other elements that contribute to decay and deterioration that can weaken their protective properties. For this reason, they require periodic repairs and occasional replacement so they do not fail when put to the test by severe weather.



WHEN YOUR BUILDING NEEDS ROOF WORK, THESE BASIC QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS COME TO THE FOREFRONT:

- 1 WHO SHOULD YOU SELECT?**
How can you find an honest company that will not take advantage of you?
- 2 WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?**
If there are roof leaks, will the roofer do the repairs needed or try to up-sell you into replacing an entire roof?
- 3 WHEN SHOULD THE WORK BE DONE?**
Is there a better time of year to have a roof replaced if immediate repairs are not needed?

Roof repair and replacement can be a very expensive and daunting proposition. Hiring a roof contractor is like finding a good auto mechanic—identifying someone you trust to perform an important service you know little about and for which you cannot see the work or evaluate its quality. Recognizing this challenge, below is a list of items the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety (IBHS) recommends to help business owners make informed decisions about choosing a dependable roof contractor with a track record for ethical business practices and quality work.

Roof Contractor Basics

What to look for when hiring a roofing contractor checklist:

- Look for a well-established, licensed and bonded roofing professional with a federal tax identification number and a permanent address
- Check references that specifically include other commercial buildings in your area
- Contact your local Better Business Bureau to check for complaints filed against the company
- Ask to see the company's certificates of insurance. Make sure its coverage for liability and workers' compensation insurance is current.
- Discuss available material warranties from the manufacturer and installation warranties from the contractor
- Check to see if the company is a member of a roofing industry organization that provides continuing education and up-to date information about roofing trends and developments
- Obtain several bids for services

CONTINUING EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATIONS

Several organizations offer roofing contractors continuing education, expertise and information on the latest technologies and industry trends. Two widely known and reputable roofing associations are RCI, Inc. (RCI) (www.rci-online.org) and the National Roofing Contractors Association (NRCA) (www.nrca.net). While membership is not a seal of approval for participating companies, it does suggest that a roofing contractor has made an investment in learning and implementing best practices.

Another way to enhance your quality control is to hire a RCI-certified third-party consultant to assist in selecting, managing, and/or observing reputable roof contractors. A consultant can help determine the needed repairs or roof replacement system, verify the materials are installed properly, and the installation meets the design requirements. Retaining a consultant adds expense but can be a valuable investment. For large, complicated jobs, it may be worth hiring a consultant who can assist with the actual design and various logistics, such as a Registered Roof Consultant. Other times, ensuring proper quality control and peace of mind may be achieved by hiring a Registered Roof Observer:

REGISTERED ROOF CONSULTANT (RRC)

This credential identifies professionals with an in-depth knowledge of roof system design parameters including available materials, thermal requirements, vapor flow considerations, ventilation, wind loading, drainage, fire resistance, building code issues and life-cycle costs.

Other tasks performed by a RRC include roof condition assessments, repair and maintenance recommendations with budgets, specification preparation, contract administration, project management, failure investigation and analysis, litigation support, administration of roof asset management programs, and roof system installation quality assurance.

REGISTERED ROOF OBSERVER (RRO)

The RRO functions as a neutral party to observe workmanship to make sure it is in compliance with the standards described in the contract documents. These certified quality assurance observers facilitate compliance with the project specifications, detailed drawings, and manufacturer's requirements. They also properly document and submit reports to the project team during the course of the project.

More information about additional designations, qualifications, and exam requirements is available on the RCI website (www.rci-online.org).

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BID SOLICITATION AND CONTRACTOR SELECTION

Once you have asked and answered the basic questions about potential contractors, you should solicit several bids before making a selection. Whether this is done through a formal RFP process or more informally, be sure to request the following information from all contractors:

- **NRCA's Roofing Contractor Qualification Form¹**
- **Supporting documents to demonstrate the contractor has a clear understanding of the purpose, services, scope, and objectives of the roof project, including:**
 - Statement of Work, Legal Terms, and Conditions
 - Project schedule to show duration of major activities, critical elements and milestones necessary to complete the work.
 - Detailed manufacturer specifications of the roof cover system to be installed, including testing information or nationally-recognized approvals that the system may have received, such as from Miami-Dade, Florida Product Approvals, Texas Department of Insurance, UL, FM Approvals, etc.
 - Site utilization diagram showing construction activities being contained within the property.
 - A plan describing strategies for addressing quality control, methodology for coordination of materials delivery, temporary storage, and installation.
 - A plan for bad weather that may alter the project schedule, along with an emergency plan for locations subject to severe weather during the installation period. This should include securing or removal of any loose materials on the site.

¹ The National Roofing Contractors Association (NRCA) has a Roofing Contractor Qualification Form to help owners prequalify roofing contractors; it can be found at: www.nrca.net/consumer/qualstatement.pdf.

- **Safety Concerns**

- o Verification of a designated qualified safety representative who is charged with the responsibility of safety management for the project and will be on-site throughout the project.
- o Written safety plans for the work to be conducted, including compliance with all Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) requirements for roof work and fall protection.
- o A written hot work program for any cutting, welding, torching, brazing or any introduction of a flame-involved process in order to protect against the significant risk of fires during installation. More information from IBHS about hot work precautions and programs can be found at: www.disastersafety.org/disastersafety/commercialhot-work_ibhs.

UNDERSTANDING WARRANTIES

Warranties are typically available from the roof manufacturer and the installing contractor. Pay close attention to what the warranty does and does not include, particularly what is contained in the “Terms, Conditions, and Limitations” section, which may reference specific wind speeds, types of weather or “Acts of God.”

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SELECTION PROCESS

While it is tempting to go with the lowest cost bid, all of the above considerations should be included in the decision process. It is important when evaluating the bids, that the business owner has a clear understanding of the capabilities of the potential contractor, and the contractor fully understands the parameters of the job. The key is to avoid any miscommunication that could lead to a roof system that does not meet expectations.

If possible, try to have major roof work done when the weather is most cooperative in your geographic region. Roof work in hurricane-prone regions can be difficult during hurricane season, and in the northern part of the U.S., cold or snow can interfere with the installation process. Be aware that some roof cover systems require a certain temperature for proper installation, so the scheduling must take expected and unexpected weather of the season into account. Your contractor can provide more information.

ADDITIONAL IBHS ROOF RESOURCES

IBHS offers further guidance on maintaining, repairing and replacing your roof:

- *Protection from the Top: The Importance of Commercial Roof Cover Maintenance and Repair:* www.disastersafety.org/commercial_maintenance/protection-from-the-top-the-importance-of-commercial-roof-cover-maintenance-and-repair
- *Roof Protection Begins at the Edge:* www.disastersafety.org/disastersafety/roof-protection-begins-at-the-edge
- *Commercial Roofing: Repair, Recover or Replace:* www.disastersafety.org/hurricane/commercial-roofingrepair-recover-or-replace-the-roof
- *Benefits of Properly Maintaining Roof-Mounted Equipment:* www.disastersafety.org/commercial_maintenance/benefits-of-properly-maintaining-roof-mounted-equipment

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