



SELECTING AN ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANT

June 2006

Investigating and cleaning up a release of petroleum or other hazardous substances can be expensive. Selecting an unqualified or inexperienced environmental consultant to do the work, however, may end up costing even more.

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 Alaska's environmental cleanup regulations, related laws, and guidance documents.
- Experience in projects that are similar to yours in scope and nature.
- Excellent communication skills, both oral and written.

1... Where to Begin

After a hazardous substance discharge is discovered and reported, the first step is to compile all the information you can about the property, including the history of operations at the site, potential sources of contamination, and any company or personal records on where and how hazardous substances have been used or stored.

Prepare a brief, written description of the site, including current use, the problem as you understand it, and the potential work that may need to be done. Providing as much information as you can will enable consulting firms to give you more consistent and accurate estimates. This can save you time and money.

DEC cannot recommend specific consultants, but we can refer you to other parties that have participated in cleanup projects who may be willing to share their experiences with you.



2... Initial Contacts

Next, put together a list of companies that perform contaminated site characterization or cleanup work in that area. Companies can be found in the yellow pages under headings such as "Engineers - Environmental," or "Environmental and Ecological Services." Contact several of the companies and inquire about their experience, training, fees, and insurance coverage to determine which company best suits your needs.

The firm you select should demonstrate that it is capable and has qualified staff on board who will be available when 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, adding both cost and time to the project.

3... Questions to Ask Prospective Consultants

- What projects have they managed in the past? How similar are the projects to yours?
- Are they qualified to do the full scope of work you require, or would they need to team with another company?
- Who serves as their subcontractors for services such as excavation, monitoring-well installation, laboratory, or other services?
- Who would manage your project?
- What is their experience in working with DEC or other regulating agencies, and do their site work staff meet DEC's requirements for "qualified persons?" (see www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/csp/qp.asp)
- What potential impact will your project have on customers, neighbors, or traffic?

4... 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?
- 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?

5... Last Step: Request Proposals

After your discussions with prospective consultants, re-visit your project summary

and refine what services you believe you require. Using that as a basis, ask for proposals from firms or individuals that you believe will best meet your needs.

Proposals you review should include a scope of work, staff resumes, an estimated work schedule, anticipated costs and related fees, estimated total project cost with an itemized fee schedule, and references.

For some small projects, such as a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment, the consultant may provide only a lump-sum amount. You must decide if you are comfortable with the level of detail provided and the total cost—don't be afraid to request additional information if you have any questions about the cost!

Make sure the estimated work schedule also includes time for DEC review and approval. Here are some things to watch out for in reviewing proposals:

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

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

... For more information

Contact DEC's Contaminated Sites Program:
In Anchorage: 907-269-7503
Kenai: 907-262-5210
Fairbanks: 907- 451-2153
Juneau: 907-465-5390

www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/csp