

Renovation and restoration projects: Low bid may not meet environmental or workplace safety requirements

Whenever a renovation or restoration project is undertaken, it is the joint responsibility of the insurance company, property manager, building owner, and/or the contractor to meet all legal and legislated requirements.

In today's competitive world, there is overwhelming pressure to take low bids. But low bids may not take into account the contractor's legal requirements. The *Workers Compensation Act of BC* mandates that employers in B.C. provide a safe workplace and protect their workers against exposure to hazardous materials. Contractors who fail to meet these requirements may have their worksites closed or projects delayed to bring about compliance with the WCB Occupational Health and Safety Regulation.

Many building owners, property managers, and insurance representatives don't realize that, under law, contractors are required to ensure that all hazardous materials such as asbestos or lead are identified and abated in a safe manner. This could have the effect of adding costs to the project; but failure to do so could expose workers, occupants, and the general public to hazardous materials with significant potential liability issues for all involved.

Know what's required of you and your contractor . . .

- You are responsible for contracting with firms that meet the legislated and legal requirements to protect the health and safety of workers employed on the project site.
- You should ensure that your contractor has a qualified person inspect the site to identify any onsite hazards such as lead and asbestos, or

other hazardous materials that may be present. The survey should include any of the following materials that may be removed or disturbed during the project:

- **Taped and mudded drywall**
- **Texture coated ceilings**
- **Asbestos cement shingles, roofing, or siding**
- **Tape or paper covering forced air ductwork**
- **Vinyl asbestos tile or sheet flooring**
- **Asphalt roofing material**
- If onsite hazards are present, removal must be done by trained and qualified workers using operating procedures that meet legislated requirements.
- A Notice of Project (NOP) form must be filed at least 24 hours in advance of any project:
 - That exceeds \$100,000 for labour and material costs, or
 - Involves permanent or temporary works designed by a professional engineer, or
 - Involves the removal of hazardous materials such as lead and asbestos. (Note that employers can now complete and file the NOP online, and print the hard copy necessary for posting at the worksite. In the case of emergencies that require immediate abatement of hazardous materials, filing online will allow the work to proceed immediately rather than waiting 24 hours.)

For more information on *Notice of Project Form for Construction, Asbestos, or Lead*, look for "Forms" on www.worksafefbc.com. (Notice of Project is Form 52E49.)



... and the people you hire

Finding a competent and reliable contractor is the first step to a successful project. The more time you spend *now* prior to any construction or restoration project to check prospective contractor backgrounds and references, the more likely it will be that the repair goes smoothly and that the job will be done right.

When hiring contractors or subcontractors, be sure to protect your interests. If the business you hire is not meeting the requirements under law, you could be liable for the costs associated with any injuries plus additional costs for delays. When reviewing the bids submitted, ask whether or not abatement of hazardous materials is included in the price or whether a survey by a qualified person (as defined by the WCB OH&S Regulation) has been completed. A qualified bid gives you peace of mind and in the long run ensures that you are not facing delays and increased costs. It is good business to ensure that the bids received are qualified and complete.

Contact WorkSafeBC for assistance

Contact the WorkSafeBC Prevention Information Line: 604 276-3100 or toll-free 1 888 621-SAFE (7233) for assistance. You can also contact the WorkSafeBC Employer Service Centre at 1 888 922-2768 or 604 244-6181. You can also find information about WorkSafeBC requirements at www.worksafefbc.com.

To check a contractor or firm's record with WorkSafeBC, follow these simple steps:

1. Ask the firm for its WorkSafeBC account number.
2. Get a letter of clearance from WorkSafeBC in less than a minute at www.worksafefbc.com. Select "Obtain clearance letter" from the home page.
3. Follow the prompts on the screen to obtain the clearance letter, which measures the status of your contractor's account – telling you whether the contractor is in fact registered and paying premiums to WorkSafeBC. Be sure to do this at least twice: before hiring the firm and then again before making your final payment to the firm. If you don't have Internet access, contact our Clearance Section at 604 244-6180, or toll-free at 1 888 922-2768. Our representatives will send you the letter by fax or mail.

For information regarding the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, go online to <http://regulation.healthandsafetycentre.org/s/Home.asp>.

Work-related death, injury, illness, and disease are not, and should not be, an inevitable and acceptable cost of doing business.



WORKERS' COMPENSATION BOARD OF BC