Techniques in Construction Management

Here is Part II of Contractor Guidelines Showing Wall and Ceiling Contractors Some Important Questions Before Starting

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(EDITOR'S NOTE: In May, 1985, Construction Dimensions published the first part of this story on construction guidelines by nationally known construction consultant John R. Kubasek. This month, Kubasek details some of the questions that contractors should consider contingency planning and document management.)

8. DO I HAVE A CONTINGENCY PLAN IN CASE ONE OF THE MAJOR PIECES OF CONSTRUCTION EQUIPMENT BREAKS DOWN?

"If the contractor does not have a contingency program to replace equipment that becomes inoperative, one should be prepared immediately," Ma said.

An agreement with an equipment rental agency can be arranged that will insure the proper machinery is on the site when it is needed. Or, if the contractor is already renting this equipment, a second leasing firm may be contacted to provide the equipment, if necessary.

9. DO I HAVE A SET OF JOB DAILY REPORTS WHICH RECORD THE ACTUAL WORK PROGRESS AND DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PROBLEM AREAS?

"All daily reports pertaining to the progress of the job, and specific references to changes and change orders involving the contract, should be kept on a regular basis," Greenberg stated. "If a problem in a certain area has occurred, a detailed description of that problem and its solution should also be included in the daily reports."

These records can prove to be invaluable should a dispute regarding the questionable portion of the work take place. With an accurate description of the problem in hand, it may be demonstrated that the delay was not the contractor’s fault and a claims litigation case can be avoided.

10. DO I HAVE A PROCEDURE TO PROPERLY DOCUMENT PROBLEM AREAS AND TO PROMPTLY SEEK RESOLUTION?

Documentation is usually the key to identifying and/or solving construction problems, said Mr. Ma. Good documentation—via job diaries, progress photos, schedules, cost breakdowns, change orders, etc.—can usually (a) help you head off construction claims problems before they begin or (b) come to your defense when trouble is unavoidable.

Establish a single, document source file into which all contract documents are systematically filed, can be easily extracted for copying if necessary in order to substantiate the basis for resolving problems.

This does not have to be a super sophisticated system, Mr. Ma explained. "We at Ma & Greenberg recommend a digest of contract documents to our clients which is really a special ring binder with dividers identifying various documents that keeps all the paperwork in a neat and orderly fashion."

When you spot a problem via your documents system, Mr. Ma said, communicate with the owner immediately to achieve a resolution. Don’t wait until it’s too late. Problems on the job site will not just correct themselves, the consultant warns.

The best method of notifying the owner that problems are occurring on the job site is by certified letter, briefly stating what the particular problem is, recommendations for a solution and, if necessary, a request for a meeting with the owner to discuss the problem.

Continued next page
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11. HAVE WE SUBMITTED SHOP DRAWINGS AS CALLED FOR IN THE CONTRACT IN A TIMELY MANNER?
“The contractor must make his office staff aware that shop drawings and other submissions must be checked very carefully; approved by owner and properly filed,” Greenberg commented. “Continual late submissions and/or erroneous shop drawings (or a lack of timely response) will sooner or later result in disputes.”

12. DO WE RESPOND PROMPTLY TO ALL CORRESPONDENCE?
“When preparing the document source files, for example,” Ma said, “one member of the management team, preferably the individual with direct responsibility for managing the construction project, should also be responsible for maintaining a correspondence log. This individual should also be charged with responding to and tracking all correspondence regarding the job.”

13. ARE PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN ON A REGULAR BASIS TO RECORD THE ACTUAL WORK PROGRESS AND PROBLEM AREAS?
“Pictures of the project should be taken on a weekly, or at least monthly basis either by a professional photographer shooting under the direction of the Project Supervisor or by the supervisor himself. Should the project ultimately become immersed in a dispute, job photos can serve as an important element in the presentation of facts surrounding the details of a claim.

All job photos (regardless of who takes them) should be meticulously marked with appropriate notations. Professional progress photo photographers usually have a title block with their name; the photo number; date the picture was taken; time; orientation; section of the building; what the photo is showing; etc., built right into each photo. If you take the pictures yourself, make sure you make these notations as well.