



Selecting an Environmental Consultant

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to assist responsible parties in selecting a qualified environmental consultant. The document outlines the steps of hiring an environmental consultant, including potential questions to ask a consultant before hiring.

Why do I need a consultant?

If the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) notified you of your responsibility for the investigation and cleanup of soil, groundwater or other contaminated media under Wis. Stat. ch. 292, it is recommended that qualified professionals be hired to complete the required work. Wis. Admin. Code ch. NR 712 establishes qualifications for environmental consultants performing this type of work in Wisconsin.

Site investigations and cleanup of contamination or environmental pollution can be complex and costly. A qualified environmental consultant can help with investigating and cleaning up your property in accordance with state and federal regulations and act as a liaison between you and the DNR's Remediation and Redevelopment program (RR) staff.

A qualified, experienced consultant can:

- save time, money, and complete the project right the first time;
- help establish a cooperative relationship with regulatory agencies; and
- minimize down time for your business or land use.

Further, Wis. Admin. Code ch. NR 712 requires that some specific environmental work at a site be conducted by persons meeting certain qualifications.

How can I find a qualified consultant?

The DNR cannot endorse a specific environmental consultant or firm. However, the agency maintains a list of consultants who have identified themselves as doing environmental work in Wisconsin; see the DNR publication RR-024 "Environmental Services Contractors List." Other means of finding or selecting a consultant include calling businesses that have done environmental cleanups, contacting professional associations in which you are a member, or searching "environmental services" or "environmental engineers" on the web.

What should I tell a consultant when requesting a quote for services?

Tell the potential consultant as much as you can about your property. This will allow them to respond with a quote for the appropriate services. Information to provide to a potential consultant could include:

- the site history, including what types of businesses or land uses have existed at the property;
- materials and products used;
- materials and wastes that have been stored, recycled or disposed of;
- potential areas of contamination (e.g. the site of a previous disposal tank);
- current use of surrounding properties;

- requirements for the investigation and cleanup given by the DNR under Wis. Stat. ch. 292 and Wis. Admin. Code chs. NR 700 - 754;
- if you are in a state reimbursement program that may assist with the costs of investigation or cleanup; and
- the source of your water supply.

What should I ask a consultant?

When soliciting quotes for service, you may want to ask the potential consultant about their firm and experience, including:

- whether their staff meet the professional qualifications required in Wis. Admin. Code ch. NR 712 (e.g. whether any of their staff are licensed and registered as professional engineers and/or registered as hydrogeologists with the Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services);
- how many years of experience they have doing environmental work in Wisconsin;
- how many similar investigations and cleanups they have completed in Wisconsin or elsewhere (cleaning up a leaking petroleum tank can be very different from cleaning up hazardous waste);
- what administrative rules they expect to follow (if a potential consultant is not familiar with the Wis. Admin. Code chs. NR 700-754, governing environmental cleanups or Wis. Admin. Code ch. NR 140, governing groundwater standards, it is an indication that they are not familiar with Wisconsin regulations);
- what level of insurance they carry for errors, omissions, and liability;
- whether they will help prepare requests for reimbursement if your cleanup is eligible; and
- whether they can provide references for you to contact.

Don't hesitate to ask a potential consultant why their approach to your environmental cleanup would differ from other consultants.

What questions should I ask when checking a consultant's references?

When checking the references of a potential consultant, you may want to ask the following questions:

- What tasks did the consultant perform for you, what was the size of the project, and what type of contamination did the consultant address (to compare how similar their project is to yours)?
- Did the consultant stay on schedule, or provide reasonable explanations for delays?
- Did the consultant keep you informed of the project's status, new developments and options for cleanup?
- If problems arose, were they resolved to your satisfaction?
- Did the consultant work effectively with the DNR (and local officials if relevant)?
- Were invoices or payment requests clear and timely?
- Did the consultant request approval in advance of billing for all significant changes to the original cost estimate?

What should I expect for the cost of a cleanup?

Costs for environmental cleanup vary widely based on the type and extent of contamination and the regulatory requirements. Ask the consultant what to expect for your situation. You may also want to ask these questions:

- Will subcontractors submit competitive bids?
- What hourly rates and overhead apply to professional staff?

- What are the per diem charges for staff doing field work?
- How often will I be billed?
- How will bills be itemized?

Watch for cost estimates that are significantly higher or lower than those received from other consultants. Ask those consultants how they can get the job done more economically, or whether they think proposals from other consultants are incomplete. Also compare proposed schedules for completion of work. There may be good reasons for faster cleanups, but make sure to understand those reasons. Sometimes the least disruptive and least costly cleanups, such as natural attenuation of contamination, take the longest.

It is important to understand the terms of a contract before signing, including who will be responsible for the work and the timing. Clarify that any changes in cost or work should be approved by you first, and that the contract includes language that allows contract termination at any time if you are not satisfied with the consultant's work.

Is financial help available?

Financial assistance may be available depending on your situation. Wisconsin offers certain loans, grants and reimbursement programs for various types of cleanups. Ask your consultant if you might be eligible for financial aid, and whether they have experience with these programs. For more information on available financial programs, visit dnr.wi.gov and search "brownfields".

What else should I know?

Wisconsin has numerous options to complete an environmental cleanup while enhancing the redevelopment and resale potential of your property. An experienced consultant can help to identify the best cleanup approach while meeting your business needs.

The DNR can also provide information and assistance. Please visit the Remediation and Redevelopment (RR) program website at dnr.wi.gov and search "brownfields" for more information on cleanups, financial assistance, liability tools and more. You may also want to review cleanup related DNR publications such as, *Environmental Contamination Basics, RR-674* and *Brownfields Basics – Tools for Cleaning Up and Redeveloping Contaminated Properties, RR-663*.

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