



HIRING A CONSULTANT TO HELP SOLVE YOUR INDOOR AIR QUALITY PROBLEMS

(Excerpts from Health Canada, Office Air: A Worker Guide to Air Quality in Offices, Schools and Hospitals – 1993 (http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/air/office-bureaux/foreword_e.html))

As there are no legal restrictions on who can offer their services as an indoor air quality investigator, it will be up to you to ensure that they are qualified to do the work before you hire them. The following sections will help you find a competent consultant.

A. Where Do You Look?

There are several sources one can check for information and the names of consultants available locally. Governmental occupational health and safety regulators may be able to provide a list of consultants in your area. Other sources of information are the professional associations and public service organizations related to occupational safety and health. For instance, the Canadian Registration Board of Occupational Hygienists, the American Industrial Hygiene Association, and your provincial professional engineering association all have lists of members who provide consultant services. Another useful source can be the Yellow Pages of your phone book. Finally, there may be a university, college, or hospital in your area that has an occupational or environmental health program. Their staff professionals are often available for consultation.

B. Evaluating a Consultant's Qualifications

Once you find a consultant who claims to be able to perform an indoor air quality assessment, you will need to evaluate his or her qualifications. The best protection against an incompetent consultant is to question the prospective consultant yourself. A series of questions is given below. They should not be given equal weight, as some are minor in importance. (The list is organized roughly in descending order of importance.)

1. For how many years have you been professionally active in indoor air quality investigations?
2. Please supply a list of recent clients for whom you have performed indoor air quality investigations. (Be sure to call a few of these references to obtain their opinion on the consultant's services.)
3. Have you carried out this work on a full-time or part-time basis? If part-time:
 - a. Who is your chief employer, or in what other business ventures are you involved?
 - b. May we contact your employer concerning you?
 - c. What restrictions does your employer place on you as a part-time consultant?
4. Are you associated with the manufacture or sale of a product that could create a conflict of interest in your activities as a consultant?
5. What degrees or diplomas have you received and when? (Preferably the consultant's educational background will be in occupational hygiene or mechanical engineering.)
6. What special conferences, seminars, symposia, or short courses have you attended (especially recently) to stay up to date with current developments in indoor air quality investigations?
7. What professional associations do you belong to? What is your present grade of membership and length of time in that grade for each association?

8. Are you certified or registered by any of the following?
 - a. Canadian Registration Board of Occupational Hygienists
 - b. American Board of Industrial Hygiene (specify area of certification)
 - c. Environmental Engineering Intersociety Board (as an occupational hygiene engineer)
 - d. the provincial professional engineering association
9. What equipment do you have for conducting indoor air quality investigations?
10. What laboratories do you use for the analysis of your exposure measurement samples? Are they accredited by the American Industrial Hygiene Association? Do they participate in the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Proficiency Analytical Testing (PAT) Program and for what materials? (The American Industrial Hygiene Association journal periodically publishes a list of accredited laboratories.)
11. Can you refer me to engineering firms capable of installing controls such as local exhaust ventilation systems if these are necessary? Do you have any business connection with these firms?
12. Please indicate your fee structure. Do you work by hourly charges, estimates for the total job, retainer charges, or any of these?
13. In your charges, how do you treat such expenses as travel, subsistence, shipping, report reproduction, and computer time?
14. Can you supply a list of typical laboratory analytical fees?
15. What insurance and bonding do you have?
16. What restrictions are there on the use of your name in our reports or in litigation?
17. What are the character and extent of reports that you prepare? Can you supply an example?
18. What is the size of your staff? What are their qualifications? Who will be working on this project?

C. Defining the Work to Be Completed

Once you have found one or more consultants who can do the work, you will need to define the type of work to be completed. One of the best tools to accomplish this task is to have the consultants prepare a project proposal for your review.

Often, in a larger job, proposals from several points of view are evaluated and used as one of the bases for the final selection of the consultant. In this case, answers to pertinent questions in the preceding section may be sought in the proposal rather than in the interview.

Aside from background qualifications of the consultant, the proposal should answer the following questions:

1. How much is the service going to cost? Smaller jobs are often bid on an hourly basis, typically with a minimum of one-half day's work, plus direct expenses commonly specified. Larger jobs are usually bid at a fixed amount, based on the work steps described.
2. What is the consultant going to do? The answer to this question may range all the way from a simple agreement to study the problem to a comprehensive step-by-step plan to solve it.
3. What will be the end result? The answer to this question is all too often not clearly understood; the result is usually a report that specifies the consultant's recommendation. If you do not want to pay for the preparation of a written report, and a verbal one will do, specify this in advance. As recommendations often call for construction to be carried out by others whose work is not subject to the consultant's control, results usually cannot be guaranteed. Rather, an estimate of the results to be attained is all that can be expected.