

Why I Specify the OIRCA

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Being a specification writer is often challenging as one is required to be familiar with all aspects of the construction process. Bouncing from one project to the next and coordinating with numerous project managers, architects, engineers, building owners and product suppliers does not leave time for properly vetting each and every contractor involved in a given project. This being the case, whenever possible, we look to the different industry professionals to help guide us through quality assurance requirements.

It is the responsibility of any consultant contracted to design any structure for a private or public client, to ensure specifications are written in such a manner as to allow for multiple bidders. These specifications must also ensure the client is receiving the best value for their money.

Quality assurance (QA) should demand much more attention than it typically receives. Without proper quality assurance standards, one is leaving him/herself vulnerable to disaster.

Putting a project out to tender in the open marketplace without proper QA requirements would leave the bidding process wide open to any bidder willing to submit a price.

This could result in the contracting of work to companies who are not fully-capable of completing such work, or potentially falling into the trap of a “fly-by-night” contractor.

Throughout my professional career I have explored different ways of avoiding project pitfalls. In some instances we look to the various product manufacturers because, on occasion, these firms will have a list of contractors who are certified to install the given product. This is not a fool-proof method, though, as the product supplier may not actually have a certification training program, and will misrepresent a customer list as “certified installers.”

Another route taken in the design community is to ask for project references. This can, in some cases, confirm that the installer has done similar work in the past. However, the issue here is that the contractor could potentially provide a “best of the bunch” scenario. I, personally, feel that this is not the most ideal way of assuring quality – especially if this is the one and only method specified.

During a comprehensive meeting with the Ontario Industrial Roofing Contractors Association (OIRCA), it was described to me how extremely thorough the evaluation process was for vetting roofing contractors prior to granting membership status.

Richard Shanks, business development manager at OIRCA, explained that the association is not a typical contractor or trade association. Membership in the association is not simply given out freely to anyone willing

to fill-out the application and pay the membership fee. The OIRCA acts as the roofing industry's watchdog ensuring quality is established initially and maintained in the long-term. The association's stance on membership is you either make the grade or you don't. There are no exceptions.

I took note of the fact that the majority of the evaluation process is undertaken by professional, third-party firms for on-site inspections, as well as the evaluation of the applicant's health and safety program. This further ensures that the qualification process to gain membership in OIRCA is unbiased, open and fair to all.

In addition to the initial screening process, the OIRCA also has an annual audit process in place to further ensure its membership is continuing to perform at the level of professionalism required each and every year.

OIRCA provides the design community with peace of mind. In the event that a member were to descend from their expected level of professionalism, the OIRCA has a self-policing process for handling these scenarios through its rigorous complaint procedures.

I have found writing specifications to pre-qualify contractors on public projects to generally be a challenge. The fact that Ontario's procurement policy (the Broader Public Sector Procurement Directive) recognizes that to ensure quality service delivery, public sector organizations may require vendors to provide evidence of their qualifications. It is my belief that association memberships, particularly if a membership helps the buying organization assess the vendor's qualifications, assists greatly with the government's procurement process. Furthermore, when public funding is required, contractor scrutiny should be exhaustive.

Further to its continued efforts of raising the bar within the roofing industry, OIRCA has also reached out to the design community by creating a new committee which I am proud to say I was invited to be a part of. The "*Design Advisory Committee*" has been working with the OAA to develop architectural tours where groups of architects, engineers, purchasers, etc., will be escorted to various job sites to learn how various roofing systems are installed in real world applications. I attended the first of these tours in late July.

In closing I would like to personally recommend that any consulting firm engaged in the design or procurement of roofing services in Ontario, take a serious look at utilizing the offerings of the OIRCA.

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