

Choosing an Environmental Consultant

As a small business owner, you may need to hire an environmental consultant to help you with regulatory or permitting requirements. Environmental consultants provide important services to help business owners better understand regulatory requirements, meet permitting obligations and identify ways to improve efficiency, save money and reduce liability.

Consultants specialize in different areas like air permitting and modeling, wastewater treatment system design, wetland delineation/permitting, waste characterization, asbestos assessment/abatement and remediation or clean-up activities.

If you have never used an environmental consultant, it can be confusing to figure out what type of consultant you need and, more important, find an experienced consultant. This fact sheet provides some helpful tips in getting the right consultant for your needs.



When do I need an environmental consultant?

If you do not have the in-house technical expertise to complete permit applications, design systems or complete plans, you may need to hire a consultant. Some of Ohio EPA's regulations require the use of a certified professional or professional engineer to prepare, review, stamp or certify applications or plans. For example, permit-to-install applications submitted to Ohio EPA's Division of Surface Water must have a Professional Engineer's (PE) stamp. Companies interested in cleaning up brownfield sites through Ohio EPA's Voluntary Action Program must use a Certified Professional (CP).

If plans or applications require a PE signature or stamp and you haven't worked with a PE, Ohio EPA will be unable to process your information. Make sure you know if you are required to use a professional. If you aren't sure, contact your local Ohio EPA district office for guidance.

How do I find a consultant?

Before you talk with a consultant, it is good to have a written scope of work, budget and timeline for the project. This will be a helpful tool to both you and prospective consultants. You will need to do some homework to find the right consultant for your project. If you are unsure of how to find a consultant, start with what you know:

- Network with other businesses to see if any have hired a consultant. Ask about their experience, and whether the consultant met expectations and deadlines.
- Contact your trade or business association for recommendations.

You can also look for consultants through search engines such as Google, or check your local Yellow Pages under "environmental consultants." Remember that many consulting firms specialize in different areas, so using search terms such as "air permitting consultant" or "wastewater engineering firms" may help you more quickly narrow down the list of consultants who will meet your needs.

Ohio EPA has a list of Certified Professionals under the Voluntary Action Program with experience in site remediation. Some consultants have additional accreditations, such as being a "certified hazardous materials manager" or may hold

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other professional certifications (such as geologist, wastewater or drinking water operator). The Ohio Department of Health has a list of licensed asbestos and lead abatement contractors.

Can Ohio EPA recommend a consultant?

No. Because of our role as a regulatory agency, Ohio EPA cannot recommend specific consultants or firms to you.

What should I ask a consultant?

Once you have a potential list of consultants, you should be prepared to ask questions about their area of expertise, qualifications and scope of services. Some good questions to ask include:

1. How many years have they been doing environmental work?
2. Are they familiar and experienced with Ohio's regulatory and permitting requirements?
3. Are they experienced in projects similar to yours?
4. If the regulations require a specific credential (such as a professional engineer), does the consultant have this? If the project requires a professional engineer, are they licensed in Ohio?
5. What level of insurance do they carry for errors, omissions and liability?
6. Do they have references you can contact?

IMPORTANT: Selecting an unqualified or inexperienced consultant may result in increased costs and project delays. Once you select a consultant, get them involved early in the process so that they understand your objectives and help establish good communication channels with the Agency.

You may want to contact several consultants and compare their qualifications and experience to determine which best meets your needs. If you have specific names of projects the consultant has worked on, you can request to review Ohio EPA's files related to project. This will give you a better idea of the consultant's qualifications and the comments exchanged between the Agency and consultant during the review process.

I'm not sure if I can afford a consultant. Are there other resources available to me?

Yes. Ohio EPA and other state agencies offer services to help small businesses with their compliance requirements.

Ohio EPA's Office of Compliance Assistance and Pollution Prevention (OCAPP) provides free and confidential services to businesses that need help with Ohio EPA compliance requirements, including a toll-free hotline, extensive resource library and on-site assistance with permit applications. OCAPP also offers pollution prevention assessments to help businesses identify ways to reduce waste, improve efficiency and save money. For more information, call (800) 329-7518 or visit epa.ohio.gov/ocapp.

Ohio's Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC), On-site Consultation Program - Safety and health professionals from the program offer consultation services to help small businesses with Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) compliance. For more information, see www.ohiobwc.com/employer/programs/safety/SandHOSHAOnsiteDetails.asp.

Development Services Agency, Office of Energy, Energy Efficiency Program for Manufacturers - provides services and financial assistance to help manufacturers identify energy improvements. For more information, see www.development.ohio.gov/bs/bs_energysufficiencyprograms.htm.

Resources

List of professionals certified by Ohio EPA's Voluntary Action Program:

epa.ohio.gov/derr/volunt/certification/cpapp.aspx

Ohio EPA district office map and contacts: epa.ohio.gov/Districts.aspx