
Choosing an Environmental Consultant

As a 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 typically specialize in air permitting and modeling, wastewater treatment system design, wetland delineation/permitting, waste characterization, asbestos assessment/abatement or site remediation or clean-up activities. It is important that you clearly explain your project to the consultant and determine if he or she has the expertise to meet your specific needs.

Sometimes finding the right environmental consultant can be confusing and difficult. This fact sheet provides some tips to help identify who would best meet 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 rules require a certified professional (CP) or professional engineer (PE) 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 PE stamp. Companies interested in cleaning up brownfield sites through Ohio EPA's Voluntary Action Program (VAP) must use a CP.

Selecting an unqualified or inexperienced consultant may result in increased costs and project delays. Get your consultant involved in the process as early as possible so they understand your objectives and can help establish good communication channels with the Agency.

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 engineer before starting the search for a consultant. 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. Having as much information as possible ahead of time will be helpful to both you and your prospective consultant. Some tips to help in your search for a consultant include:

- Talk with other business colleagues who have similar projects/needs 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 associations to see if they have a list of consulting firms.
- Use online search engines to find a list of consultants in your area. 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 VAP-certified professionals who have experience in site remediation. Ohio EPA also has a list of licensed asbestos contractors and lead abatement contractors.

Can Ohio EPA recommend a consultant?

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

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What should I ask a consultant?

Once you have compiled 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:

- How many years have they been doing environmental work?
- Are they familiar and experienced with Ohio's regulatory and permitting requirements?
- Are they experienced in projects like yours?
- If the rule requires 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?
- What level of insurance do they carry for errors, omissions and liability?
- Do they have references you can contact, preferably ones with similar projects?

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 that a consultant has worked on, you can request to review Ohio EPA's files related to the project. This may give you a better idea of the consultant's qualifications and areas of expertise.

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 businesses with their compliance obligations.

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 to help small businesses with air permit applications and other paperwork. OCAPP also offers sustainability assessments to help businesses identify ways to reduce waste, improve efficiency and save money. For more information, call 800-329-7518 or visit [*OCAPP's website*](#).

Ohio's Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC), On-Site Consultation Program – offers consultation services from safety and health professionals with the program to help small businesses with Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) compliance.

Ohio Department Services Agency, Advanced Energy and Efficiency Programs – helps businesses, manufacturers, nonprofit schools and local governments reduce energy use and improve energy efficiency.

Ohio Department Services Agency, Entrepreneurship and Business Assistance Centers – provides technical assistance, training and financial counseling to Ohio's entrepreneurs, minority and small business owners.

Additional Resources

- ***Small Business Environmental Compliance Self-Assessment Guide***, a tool that can be used to perform a self-evaluation of the compliance status of your business.
- ***Ohio EPA's Guide to Environmental Permitting in Ohio***, a guide to help determine what permits you need, why you need them and how to get them.
- ***Ohio EPA's Permit Wizard***, an interactive tool to guide you in identifying the various EPA permit, licensing and registration requirements that may apply to your business.
- ***Columbus, Ohio District Office U.S. Small Business Administration***
- ***Cleveland, Ohio District Office U.S. Small Business Administration***
- ***Ohio EPA, District Office map and contacts***