



# HIRING THE RIGHT DEMOLITION CONTRACTOR

## *Why is finding the right demolition contractor with the proper expertise so important?*

As a part of the construction and demolition process, you have responsibilities. You are responsible to the public, the project employees, and last but certainly not least, the owner. With that responsibility comes risk.

Some of you may remember the collapse and subsequent deaths and injuries at the Salvation Army Store in Philadelphia. In another example, a demolition contractor sub-contracted the demolition work at a power plant, hiring a “good” bridge blaster to bring down the boiler using explosives. Unfortunately, that bridge blaster did not know that boilers react differently. In addition to the OSHA citations to the contractor after a fatality of an employee, a state public utility commission fined the utility owner \$5.5 million for **lack of oversight** and **poor vetting**. This was one of numerous fatalities and injuries at the same site, magnifying the problem.

Are you willing to risk your company or lives by not doing a thorough check of the contractor that you are going to hire? You can minimize the risk by learning what those risks might be by properly vetting your potential contractors. Sometimes using a lesser qualified contractor that is less expensive may be worth the risk. That is your decision to make. However, you must be aware of the potential risks at hand.

## ***Introduction***

Virtually every structure built by man has a definite life span and will need to be demolished or deconstructed at some point in time, usually to be replaced by a new structure. Making the decision to conduct demolition activities can be a difficult decision to make, as demolition can come with a hefty implementation cost, the loss of jobs, or worse, the loss of the business. The manner in which the demolition or deconstruction is done has an impact on worker and public safety, the environment, and the community.

To those outside of the demolition industry, demolition is often viewed as “reverse construction” and is typically visualized by a wrecking ball or other large pieces of equipment. However, demolition takes many forms and is so much more than that simple definition. From removing an internal, non-load bearing partition wall to the complete demolition, the rehabilitation of a redundant mining site or the implosion of an inter-city high rise, the forms of demolition are extensive.

Regardless of the scope and complexity of a project, all existing structures must be demolished safely and properly. Although many contractors may be capable of performing simple projects safely, such as removing a shed or a carport, any project that is more complex should be done by a qualified demolition company. The question for the owner of the project is, therefore, “how do I identify the right demolition contractor for this job?”

### ***Demolition Expertise***

The true strength of a good demolition company lies in the skills of its personnel. A good demolition contractor has trained, experienced workers, with appropriate licenses and certifications in place as needed. The workers know how to help plan job, follow the plan, and do the work safely and productively.

Upfront planning and preparation for both small and large demolition jobs involves intensive analysis and in-depth examination of the structure and the surrounding area. This effort often means reverse-engineering structural assessments derived from the initial investigation to best assess the primary characteristics and stability of such structures and derive from this the best methodology to be used during any demolition operation. The information generated during the assessment and planning phase is then used to verify whether the anticipated methods are appropriate, and to anticipate the structure’s response during dismantling operations. This process is critical as fully detailed as-built information is often not available. A good demolition contractor has a team that has extensive knowledge of demolition techniques and is very good at creating a comprehensive demolition plan that will get the job done on time and without injury or incident.

### ***Safety***

If you are familiar with demolition, then you may know that the vast majority of demolition work is not simply blowing things up. Instead, it is a series of complex operations to bring down a structure in a safe manner, and this work comes with high risk and is fundamentally dangerous. However, risk can be minimized by hiring a good, qualified demolition contractor.

The good demolition contractor considers safety of the workers and the surrounding public in every step of the demolition process. All federal, state and municipal regulations that have a bearing on safety are carefully followed, at a minimum, to ensure there are no unintended consequences to anyone. A Job Hazard Analysis is conducted, and a Site Safety Plan is developed and put in place. All employees are informed about not only the demolition plan, but also the site safety plan that accompanies it. A good demolition contractor finds injury to any worker or member of the public unacceptable and does everything within its power to ensure none occur.

Some companies may find the cost of a truly safe job to be too high. The good, responsible demolition contractor, however, knows that the costs of accidents, injuries and death are much higher. First, no responsible contractor wants any member of his or her team hurt, nor any member of the public, simply from a humanitarian view. Next, not only are there the immediate monetary costs associated with a death or injury, the economic impact can also include a significant delay in the completion of the project and years of litigation whose costs dwarf any expenditures on safety measures.

## ***Environmental Impact***

There are several environmental and health hazards present on demolition sites. Demolition activities can create hazards such as respirable dust. Within the structures themselves, asbestos, polychlorinated biphenyls, lead paint, freon, mercury, silica, Gasoline Range Organics/Diesel Range Organics, and radiological contaminants are commonly encountered.

However, It is not enough to demand that a demolition contractor ensure compliance with basic rules and regulations. The project owner must also think in terms of minimizing long term risk by safeguarding themselves, their local ecosystem, and their overall property. Professional demolition crews are experienced and knowledgeable on all aspects of handling hazardous materials as they routinely encounter them. For instance, most qualified demolition service companies are equipped and experienced for performing asbestos remediation and/or environmental clean-up on their own, or they partner with a firm focusing primarily on the safe handling, removal, transportation, and disposal of these materials and whom they know to be trustworthy and reliable.

## ***Compliance***

The demolition industry is well-regulated; however, the demolition and construction regulations are incredibly complicated. For instance, there is an EPA notification required on almost all structural demolition projects within a very specific time frame, but state and local rules can and do in many cases become even more stringent. The demolition professional must know the laws and regulations that are required on any demolition project.

Reputable demolition service companies have experience, and properly licensed and trained employees to ensure the project is in compliance with the relevant local and federal regulations. Regulatory compliance is essential, especially when the demolition project involves hazardous materials or regulated wildlife/plant life habitats. Regulatory compliance is also important with regards to runoff water and erosion control that can impact the environment. When an owner employs a quality professional demolition contractor, they are protected against potential fines, and can rest assured that all documentation requirements are well-organized and very much in order.

## ***Cutting-edge or Effective Techniques***

A quality demolition company is always looking for ways to conduct work in safer, more productive way. They keep track of industry innovations that can be helpful in one or both ways and add them to their equipment arsenal. For example, there have been many developments where a worker can operate a piece of robotic equipment via a Bluetooth connection in a hazardous location while remaining outside the hazard area. At the other end of this spectrum are massive machines that can reach incredibly high in the air to demolish tall structures from a distance.

A project owner will want to know whether the demolition contractor under consideration is current with the latest technology and using it to advantage.

### ***Expertise comes with a price but so does lack of expertise***

The low bidder usually gets the job. However, the long-term price tag may greatly exceed the price of the accepted proposal. For example, consider the Salvation Army Building Collapse in Philadelphia. The owner wanted to do the job as cheaply as possible so it went to the lowest bidder.

As a result, six people died, four others were injured, the case was litigated in court for years, individuals were jailed, OSHA violations were assessed, major insurance claims were made, etc. While this was an extreme case, imagine having to be the person to inform families that their loved one was killed or injured when the accident was totally preventable.

A project owner needs to always consider not only the upfront costs, but also the possible long-term costs should a disaster occur. While nothing is certain in this world, there is definitely a better chance for a successful completion of a demolition job when a good, qualified demolition contractor is hired to do the work.

### ***In Conclusion***

Project owners should take the following steps to protect themselves when considering how to have a structure demolished:

1. Pre-qualify a company by looking at their safety record, their financial abilities, their insurance, and their level of experience and training. Make sure you know what you are purchasing when you reach out to find the best company for your project. The NDA has developed a checklist to help you through the qualification process.
2. Do not always use the low bidder. Use the best qualified bidder and consider using a selection matrix in your decision-making process to ensure your chosen contractor meets all your necessary requirements.
3. Consider asking for performance and payment bonds- but remember the protection afforded by these is limited
4. Become more knowledgeable about demolition. One way to do this is by taking training offered by the National Demolition Association, the leading demolition contractor association in the US.



# HOW TO CONDUCT A BACKGROUND CHECK ON A DEMOLITION CONTRACTOR CHECKLIST

## Initial Evaluation for a Demolition Contractor

- Check OSHA Records
- Check regulatory violations- EPA, OSHA, etc.
- Get Experience Modification Rates from demolition contractor's insurance company
- Obtain copies of insurance policies and verify acceptable to your insurance company. Make sure the policy specifically covers demolition.
- If required in your area, make sure they are licensed as a demolition contractor.
- Ensure that their experience is specific to the proposed type of work to be performed by the contractor.
- Ask for a list of all projects with contact names and phone numbers.
- Verify that the company has the financial ability to handle a project of the size needed.
- Whether purchased or not, verify that the company has the ability to obtain a Performance and Payment bond, and verify that the bonding company is well rated.

## After a Qualified Contractor has been Identified

Once a contractor is deemed qualified and meets all your standards regarding the above:

- Ask for details regarding their means and methods to perform the work.
- Ask for resumes of those individuals who will be managing the work, both on site and off site and check their experience
- If you do not have the ability to evaluate the contractor, their personnel, or their means and methods, retain someone qualified to do so.