



Why hire an engineer vs. working directly with an ESCO, contractor or vendor

May 07, 2012 - Design / Build

Owners and property managers are working every day to maintain reliable, comfortable and cost efficient building operations. This includes preventive maintenance, repair or corrective maintenance, routine cleaning and maintenance, and construction.

During these activities, contractors and vendors are routinely contacted to provide proposals for equipment repairs or replacement on a one-for-one basis. Unsolicited and solicited proposals for HVAC, domestic hot water, lighting and solar projects are often received from utility companies, energy service companies, energy consultants, contractors, vendors and manufacturer's representatives.

Each of these proposals in one way or another will have an impact on the building's performance and operating costs. Often the savings estimates for all of these proposals may total more than the energy use for the entire building. This is one of the first reasons to hire a professional engineer as your trusted advisor.

Engineers provide technical analysis, engineering design, and construction management services. An engineer is someone who works out the design and construction of a building, but also takes into consideration the strengths and weaknesses of the materials and equipment. Engineers also evaluate and recommend projects to improve energy efficiency and are familiar with a wide range of incentive and finance programs. Engineers bring science, theory and practice to a project and their involvement can result in significant savings.

A contractor is usually the company that takes the requirements and design set forth by the engineer and creates the end result. Contractors supply material and labor at a specified price for construction work. A contractor brings knowledge of construction means and methods.

* HVAC Contractors install, maintain and service heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning equipment for residential, commercial, institutional and industrial properties.

* Electrical Contractors install, maintain and service electrical and lighting equipment for residential, commercial, institutional and industrial properties.

* Solar Contractors install, modify, maintain and repair solar energy systems.

* Energy Service Companies (ESCO) typically provide many services, including energy audits, equipment maintenance, project financing, and performance guarantees.

Contractors typically send out a salesman that may not fully understand the problem but may try to apply their products to your property. Contractors are installers, not designers or engineers. Any contractor that suggests that an engineer is not necessary is only trying to protect his bid and does not have your best interest in mind.

If a Professional Engineer issues an opinion, the contractor is not legally allowed to override the Engineer's opinion, only another Professional Engineer can disagree with their opinion.

Remember: vendors representing manufacturers may be limited in their product offering and you need to be sure to you are getting the best products and services.

Your first call should be to a professional engineer, because:

1. We level the playing field by providing a scope of work and bid documents.
2. We provide periodic observations of progress and quality of the contractor's work.
3. We provide engineering certification that is required in many projects and programs.
4. We assist in the selection of contractors, since not all contractors have equal knowledge or experience.
5. We guide clients through a complicated business. The building energy and technology revolution is fast and complicated. It's a lot for anyone to grasp, much less keep up with.

Edward Brzezowski, P.E., LEED AP, is vice president of energy services for The Falcon Group, Bridgewater, N.J.

New York Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540