



Should You Hire A Roofing Consultant?

A Roofing Consultant May Be Able To Take Some Of The Pressure Off

TPO. EPDM. PVC. It's not always easy making sense of the alphabet soup of roofing – especially if you have numerous buildings to manage. How do you know whether a roof should be replaced or if it can simply be repaired? Can you use the same roofing material on a manufacturing plant that you used on an office building and expect the same results? How do you know that a new roof is being installed correctly and according to code?

Fortunately, there is a resource building owners and facility managers can use to help them sort through these and other roofing issues – an independent roofing consultant.

“It can be a daunting task to select a roofing system, because there are so many choices in today's volatile roofing market,” says David Denman, president of Dublin, Ohio-based Roof Management LTD. “As specialists in the roofing indus-

try, roofing consultants can help companies handle the business and technical aspects of this very large expenditure, and help them make cost-effective decisions about their roofs.”

What is a Roofing Consultant?

It is important to know how roof consultants differ from architects, engineers and roofing contractors. Like an architect or engineer, a roofing consultant can design and specify a roof. However, Denman states, “roofing consultants have specialized knowledge and experience that most architects and engineers do not possess. In fact, many architectural and engineering firms will hire their own roofing consultants when it comes to large roofing projects.”

And because they do not have affiliations with any roofing manufacturers, good roofing consultants are unbiased, independent third-party resources. In

fact, a good roofing consultant will have a thorough understanding of many different types of roofing systems.

“Some roofing consultants might specialize in something like single-ply, but we believe each segment of the roofing industry has good and bad products,” says Kent Mattison, president of Benchmark, Inc., a roof consulting firm based in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. “We recommend you look for someone who has experience in different types of roofing systems so they can find the best fit for your roofing needs. Sometimes there are three or four options, which gives you more flexibility.”

Designing Matters

As mentioned earlier, one important job roofing consultants can do is produce roofing designs and specifications.

“We see design as one of the most cost-effective factors of the roof system,”

Mattison says. “The cost of design is relatively small compared to the cost of the roof, and yet good roof design can have a big impact on the long-term performance of the roofing system.”

However, Denman cautions about consultants that tend to “over-design” roofing systems. “Sometimes a customer needs or can only afford a Chevy, so you shouldn’t design a Cadillac for them,” Denman explains. “The consultant should be aware of the customer’s needs and what is best for him or her.”

A Selection of Services — Before, During and After Installation

Roofing consultants do much more than design roofing systems, however. Here are just some of the services they can offer before, during and after the installation of a new roof.

Before Installation – One crucial task a roofing consultant can do is determine if the roof, in fact, does need to be replaced, or if the life of the roof can be prolonged through repairs.

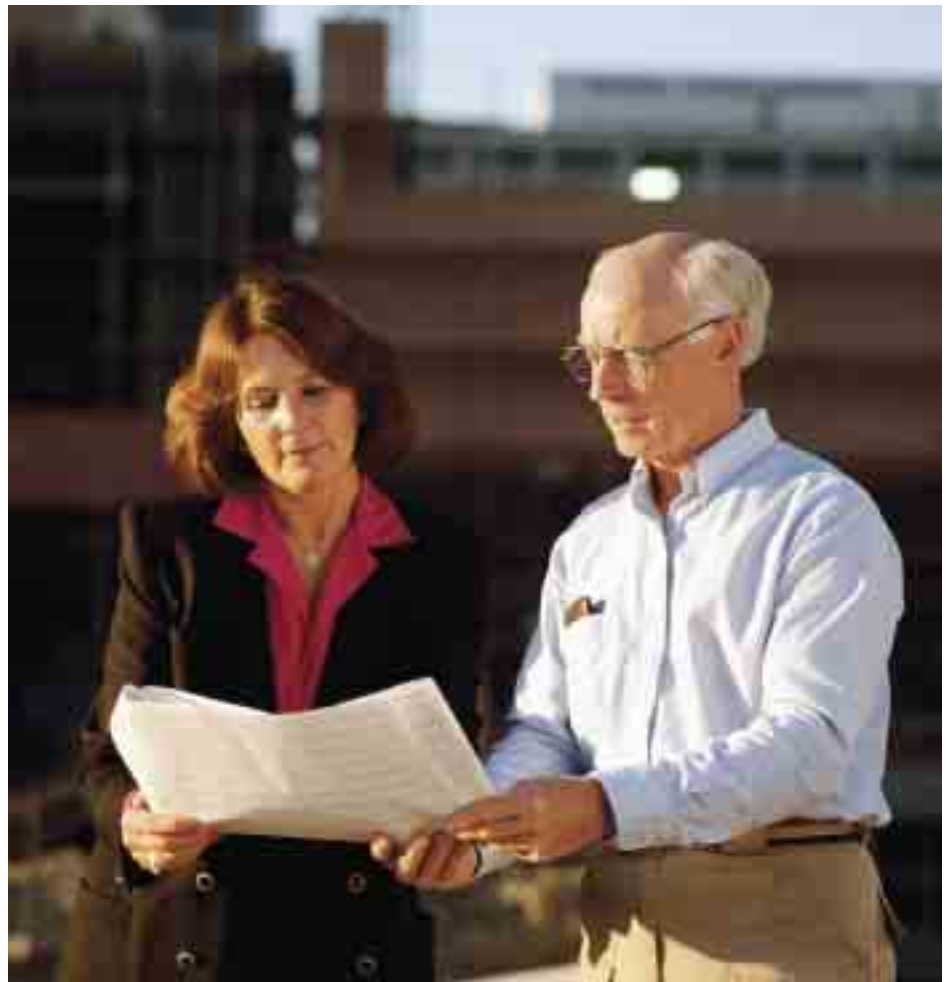
“We can take an inventory of all of their roofs, give them some idea of where they are and help them do some proactive planning for maintaining, repairing or replacing the roof,” Mattison explains. “This is where the advantage of having an unbiased third party comes in. We aren’t in the business of selling roofs, but rather are in the business of helping building owners extend the lives of their roofs.”

If it is decided that it is more cost-effective to replace a roof, or if a roof is being installed on new construction, the roofing consultant can help the building owner select a roofing contractor.

“We can also prepare legal documents for bidding, screen qualified contractors and help building owners evaluate bids,” Denman points out.

During Installation – Another important service roofing consultants offer is quality control during the installation of the roof.

“We can have someone on the roof every day during the installation process to make sure the specifications are being followed,” Mattison states. “This is



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important because quality control is one of the weakest links in the construction chain.”

Denman adds this is one service he wishes clients would use more often.

“On some difficult projects the building owner may only want part-time quality control inspections,” he explains. “The contractors do a great job the days the consultant is there, but problems can occur on the days he or she is absent.”

As Mattison points out, “one careless worker can nullify the most painstaking efforts of the design team.”

After Installation – Once the work is completed, the roofing consultant can draw up a roof maintenance program for the roof, and if desired, perform annual roof inspections.

“Roof maintenance isn’t stressed enough when it comes to extending the life of a roof,” Mattison says. “That’s why we not only help companies establish maintenance programs, but will also

work with their roofing contractors or train in-house people to make sure the maintenance is conducted properly.”

Some roofing consultants also offer Roof Asset Management programs. As Denman explains, these proprietary programs, which are usually computer- and/or Internet-based, “can help building owners manage all the information of each roofing asset.” Owners can track when maintenance is scheduled and performed, maintain roofing files (including information such as who installed the roof, what the terms of the warranty are, what insulation was used), keep file photos of the roof to track problems and anticipate roofing improvements. This information is invaluable if there is a roofing problem or insurance claim relating to the roof.

“The roof is such a large expenditure that it only makes sense to make sure this asset is managed properly,” Denman adds.

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Finding the Best Roofing Consultant for Your Needs

Since there are no restraints on who can call themselves roofing consultants, building owners should use care in selecting one.

“When evaluating roofing consultants, ask them if they’ve done a project of this size and scope before,” Denman advises. “Ask them questions like: Why should I hire you? Can you give me a list of people you’ve worked with in the past? Will you listen to my needs?” Denman also recommends that after the first meeting the building owner asks for the consultant to restate – both verbally and in writing – what the building owner expects of the roofing consultant.

Mattison echoes many of Denman’s suggestions. “References are very important,” he agrees. “You should also look at examples of their work, and look for experience in certain situations and geographic areas similar to yours, as well as industry-related experience.”

Mattison does warn against “choosing someone just because they agree with you. You need to be a little broader in your evaluation.”

Another thing to consider is whether or not the consultant is a member of the Roof Consultants Institute (RCI). This international, non-profit organization based in Raleigh, North Carolina, strives, among other things, “to support professionalism, ethical behavior,

education and research in the roofing industry.” RCI members that have passed written exams, and proven themselves through character references and professional experience, earn the title of Registered Roof Consultant (RRC). The RCI has a web site with some very useful information at www.rci-online.org.

It is possible for building owners to sort through the alphabet soup of roofing products by themselves and still find the solutions best for them. However, having a capable roofing consultant by their side will most likely help them select and manage this important building asset with little or no indigestion. ▲

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