King County Green Tools

Powered by the Solid Waste Division

Eco-Cool Remodel Tool

Selecting a Contractor

Hiring the right contractor is essential to the success of your project. To ensure your contractor will help you achieve your green building goals, seek out a professional with solid qualifications and experience relevant to your desired project, and knowledge of green building. A good place to start is with Built Green contractor members – visit *services.masterbuildersinfo.com/Portaltools/BGDirectory/Index.cfm*, and search by "Builder/Remodeler." Talk to three or more professionals and use this checklist to choose the contractor that's right for you.

"MUST-HAVE" Qualifications

- ❑ Licensed, bonded and insured. A contractor who has long done business in Washington will have greater knowledge and experience with locally available materials, practices, as well as insight into unique climate and weather considerations.
- ❑ EPA Lead Safe Renovation Certification or Washington State Department of Commerce's Renovation, Repair and Painting Program (RRP) Certification (not applicable if your house was built after 1978).

Professional Credentials

These are hallmarks of formal training, proficiency and commitment. Request certification dates to determine how current the credential is. Check resources like homebuilder's association affiliation or online reviews, and verify credentials.

Check all that apply *(oftentimes, the more the better)*

Certifications	Affiliations
❑ BPI (Building Performance Institute) credential	❑ Built Green / Master Builders Assoc.
❑ RESNET HERS Rater	❑ Northwest EcoBuilding Guild
❑ LEED Accredited Professional (Homes)	❑ Home Performance Washington
❑ Green Advantage Certified Associate/Practitioner	❑ Passive House
❑ Certified Sustainable Building Advisor	❑ International Living Future Institute
❑ Other (list): _____	❑ Other (list): _____

Waste Reduction

Hire a contractor who will use best practices to reduce waste through salvage, reuse and recycling.

Ask the following questions *(guidance is provided to the right):*

What is your average recycling rate on jobs?	*Look for high percentage answers – higher than 75% is common in King County.*
Where do you take your materials and how do you ensure they are really recycled?	*Ensure answers include certified facilities.*
How are your costs affected by the amount of materials brought to the landfill vs. recycling?	
How do you minimize waste of materials (i.e. what is your strategy for ordering only what you need)?	*Listen for proper calculations, a small cushion or "waste factor" (less than 10%).*
How do you encourage/enforce best practices for waste reductions among your subcontractors?	*Answers should include signage and training.*

Indoor Air Quality (IAQ)

To ensure the health and safety of workers as well as your own family, check that the contractor has a plan in place for protecting health during your remodel.

Ask the following questions *(guidance is provided to the right):*

How do you choose materials to protect IAQ?	*Listen for product ingredients, VOC levels, green product certifications/labels, etc.*
How do you encourage/enforce best practices among your subcontractors, especially with regard to non-toxic materials such as adhesives and sealants?	
How will you protect my house from dust/debris when working?	*Listen for examples of masking off rooms, depressurizing work areas, etc.*
Do you allow smoking on your jobsites?	*Answer should be "absolutely not!"*
How do you protect construction materials to prevent moisture from entering the home?	

General Questions

Ask the following questions *(guidance is provided to the right):*

How did you learn your trade?	*Listen for references to "experts," mentorships, trainings, stories that provide clues to her/his openness for learning.*
What was a recent jobsite problem and how did you overcome it?	
Do you take care of all code requirements and permit applications, including drainage permits when applicable?	
Are you able to connect me to potential incentives and rebates for any of the work you will be doing?	
How skilled/experienced are you with green building? (On a scale of 1-10 with 10 being high)	*If less than 8, ask if she/he is willing to learn and how she/he will go about increasing this level during her/his next job.*
Do you certify your projects through Built Green or other rating systems?	
How do you stay current with green building trends?	*Listen for titles to publications, blogs, educational events, conferences, etc.*
Can you provide references from previous clients?	*Follow up with at least one client and ask about their experience, results and satisfaction.*

Does the Contractor See Your House as a System

All elements of your home are connected – directly or indirectly. Ultimately, a contractor who understands the whole house approach, or "house as a system," is an asset to your project.

There's a big difference between the motivations of someone who is trying to sell you one particular product and someone who is *committed to finding the best overall methods to reduce energy usage*. Be wary of a contractor who tries to sell you on insulation without talking to you about air sealing at the same time. Or, a contractor who wants to put in a new heating system without talking to you about options for improving your existing distribution system by sealing ducts or insulating hot water pipes in order to maximize performance.

Contractors who focus on the house as a system typically work under the designation of *home performance contractor.* Washington Home Performance, an industry trade organization, trains and supports home performance contractors in the house as a system. See the member directory at *washingtonhomepeformance.org*. Also look for contractors experienced with Built Green Remodel or Retrofit certification.

Ask the following questions *(guidance is provided to the right):*

What can you tell me about building science?	*Listen for a description of how and why air, heat and moisture flow within a home.*
If you recommend a particular product, such as a furnace, what considerations will you use to help choose the product for my house?	*Listen for references to duct leakage testing, whole house air sealing, insulation, ENERGY STAR label, combustion safety, etc.*