

HOW TO WORK WITH CONTRACTORS TO REBUILD AND REPAIR

After the flood waters recede, business owners or occupants of facilities will be left with buildings in varying states of disrepair. The question immediately asked is how to rebuild so business can resume.

To do this both efficiently and effectively, establish priorities, Jerry Rounds, director of ISU Extension to Business and Industry, said.

The building must be safe. Areas of greatest concern are structural systems and electrical systems:

- A thorough job of cleanup must be completed.
- An assessment of damage must be made.
- An evaluation of alternatives for rebuilding must be completed and one alternative selected. Alternatives for repair generally fall in categories of minor, major and partial or complete rebuilding.
- A plan must be developed.
- The plan must be executed.

Rounds provides the following tips:

Flood water could have either weakened or removed soil from under the foundation. Water pressure could have moved the building or parts of it onto weaker soil. Unequal pressure within the structure could have caused beams, columns or walls to deform and lose their load-carrying capabilities. These possibilities can be investigated by a structural engineer, or, in the case of soil conditions under the foundation, a geotechnical engineer.

Water in the electrical systems may have damaged insulation or may even be trapped in the wiring, setting up the possibility of short circuits. This could result in damage to the electrical system or even fire. If the water is clean, there is the possibility that when the system dries, no residual damage will remain. However, in a flood situation, the water carries silt, which will probably remain in the system to contaminate it. Flood damaged electrical systems should be inspected by an electrical contractor before the systems are reactivated.

Local construction companies can help you assess damage and evaluate alternatives. Contact a general contractor who will walk through the facility to identify problems. The general contractor might bring along specialty contractors in electrical systems and/or mechanical systems. They can then assess what must be done to fix the problems and how much this will cost.

This cost estimate can be done at many levels. A “ball park” estimate can be done rather quickly and provide an idea of what the costs will be. Such estimates help when making key decisions about such things as rebuilding, relocating and coordinating repairs. An accurate estimate of costs will take more time, but can be used as the basis of a contract to do the work.

Once you decide to make relatively minor repairs, get bids from at least three reputable contractors. Base your evaluation of bids not only on cost, but also on the product being purchased: that is, the way in which repairs are to be accomplished. Time of completion is another factor to consider.

If major repairs or partial or complete rebuilding are required, you should contact an architect to help analyze what must be done and how much it will cost. If you decide to proceed with the work, the architect will produce a design and contractors will be selected to execute the design. The selection process can be either through bidding or through negotiation with a contractor you know and trust. Completion can be expedited by using “fast track”

construction where the contractor starts work while the architect is still completing the design, but this generally requires negotiation with a single contractor rather than bidding.

A key to success is finding reputable contractors, engineers and architects. Rounds suggests you:

- Contact a local association for a list of member companies. Most larger communities have chapters of such organizations as the American Institute of Architects, Consulting Engineers Council, Associated General Contractors, and Associated Builders and Contractors.
- Pre-qualify the companies you are considering working with by asking such questions as: How long have you been in business in this community? What projects have you completed that I could visit? What clients have you worked for that I could talk with?

When contracting with companies to do the work, in addition to cost, the contract should cover such items as time of completion, basis for acceptance of work, and basis for charging for change in or additions to the work.

Source: Iowa State University Extension Service