



Nine Things to Consider When Hiring a Safety Consultant

Sometimes you need help. Whether it is an attorney, an accountant, or a safety professional – all professionals with specific expertise that can make your life a lot easier. But, you often do not need them full-time. You want to be able to call on your professionals and know your questions will be answered and their advice will be accurate. So, what should you consider when hiring a safety consultant?

1. What are your needs?

The first thing to determine is what you need. Some companies do not have any safety staff and look to outside consultants to fill in, while others may need specific expertise, or assistance with a monitoring project. Here are some questions to consider:

- Are you looking for general help with your safety and health program?
- Do you need a compliance audit, industrial hygiene monitoring, specific safety training, help lowering your injury rate, a jump start for your safety committee?
- Do you need help figuring out what you need?
- How much can you do and how much do you want the consultant to do?
- Do you have a specific concern, such as an issue employees brought up, an exposure concern, or a machine guarding issue?

2. What makes the consultant qualified to do the work?

Safety professionals are not licensed in Minnesota. That means that anyone could hang up a shingle and call themselves a safety person. So, how do you know what you are getting?

- What education has the person had? How did the consultant learn the profession?
- Does the consultant hold any applicable nationally recognized certifications? Does the certification program require a certain amount of training and experience, testing, and continuing education? Anyone can become a certified safety manager by taking two courses given by the company that does the certification. That's a far cry from a Certified Safety Professional credential, which requires a base of knowledge and experience, references, and rigorous testing. Look for a certification recognized by NOCA (National Association for Competency Assurance), CESB (Council of Engineering and Scientific Specialty Boards), or even tougher, ANSI/ISO (American National Standards Institute/International Organization for Standardization). These are the commonest professional safety and health certifications:
 - Certified Safety Professional (CSP)
 - Associate Safety Professional (ASP. This is an interim step to CSP)
 - Certified Industrial Hygienist (CIH)
 - Certified Hazardous Materials Manager (CHMM)
- What experience with your specific concern does the consultant have?
 - Has that experience been under the direction of another safety and health professional or independent?
 - Has the consultant done work in your industry or similar industries?

3. Will the services offered be customized to meet your needs?

There are a number of options for delivery of services. If you are looking for written safety programs, you can order them online and receive a book or program that you either have to customize or take it as is. That will not help you determine what parts of the program actually apply to you. Some consultants work the same way – they have programs they have developed and all of their customers get the same thing. This may be less expensive, but may not fit your needs.

So services range from generic programs to those developed specifically for your facility and to match your needs. If you are hiring a consultant to help with programs, will they develop them for your specific facility? Will you and your staff participate in the development? Will the consultant review the finished programs with you so that you know what's in them and how they fit your needs – or will they just deliver a ring binder that sits on a shelf?

4. Will the consultant be flexible?

Sometimes you have special requests that need to be honored. You may need training at non-standard hours (midnight, 5 am or right at 1:20 pm). You may not want everything that is included in the consulting firm's regular package (if they have one). There may be times where you work with one consultant on one project and a different one on another, possibly due to specific expertise. Remember, you are the customer and this needs to work for you, as much as for the consultant.

5. Are the services up to date and the consultant's knowledge current?

One track to consulting is retirement from being a safety person in a company. Once he or she is removed from his or her company, how is the consultant staying current?

- Does he or she attend local and national conferences? Participate in the professional associations?

It may be important to you to have someone available on a long term basis. Is the consultant a freelancer looking to pick up some cash, someone between jobs, or is he or she committed to consulting? There's nothing wrong with the freelancer, but you do want some assurance you'll be able to find your consultant when you have a question about the work six months from now.

6. What about insurance and liability?

We often hear this is a litigious society, so how can you protect yourself and your company? You want to make sure that the consultant you hire carries the proper insurance. That usually means workers' compensation insurance, business liability insurance, and errors and omissions (professional liability) insurance.

While insurance is not the answer to everything, it does show a level of professionalism and may lower your exposure.

Along with the insurance, you want the agreement with the consultant to be in writing. Contracts spell out responsibilities and make it clear what services are being delivered.

7. Who owns the work?

Usually if you pay for reports or programs to be developed, you want to own the rights to that information. Consulting is about intellectual property. If a consultant develops a program for you, how will you get copies of it? Are paper or electronic copies provided, or is this something that stays on the consultant's website? We were surprised recently to learn that a company was uncertain about changing consultants because the consulting firm held all of their programs. If they ended the contract, they would have no programs of their own. So, what are you paying for?

8. What is it going to cost?

The bottom line for business: what's it going to cost? This is an important question. You need to know if you have to come up with a lot of money at one time, a little money every month, or some money on occasion, and how hiring a safety consultant can help your bottom line. Some questions to consider:

- How does the consultant expect to bill and be paid?
- Is the proposal comprehensive?
- Does it describe the work you want done?
- Does it have a set price, or a not-to-exceed price, or some control over add-ons?
- What if you or the consultant discovers the work is more extensive than originally planned? Do you have a plan to handle that?
- Ask yourself, "Where can the consultant save me money?"

9. A few more things to consider

Are there any other things that would be "nice to have"? Do you want a consultant who has a good relationship with OSHA? Who has experience with safety grants? Who offers newsletters or sends out safety tips?

Do past clients hire the consultant again? Or are most contracts one-time or short term?
Are you comfortable with this person?

We often like to think safety is Number One, but in reality it is just one factor in making a company profitable.

For additional information, please contact us at chess@chess-safety.com.