
Repainting a Multi Family Complex

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An all too typical repaint story

Recently, several paint contractors had been asked to provide a quote for a residential repaint project. It had been a few years since the building was painted and the existing coating was in generally good shape, however it did show some signs of peeling on the exposed wood trim.

The resulting quotations received varied greatly, not just on price but also on the scope of work noted in the bids. For example; when it came to prep work, one quote stated that they would power-wash the entire building, a second quote stated they would power wash as required, and a third quote did not mention power-washing at all. For priming, again the work proposed was inconsistent. The quotes ranged from a full prime coat to spot priming, with some including the phrase "priming as required".

When the differences in the bids were challenged, the resulting verbal comments sounded plausible but the varied price for each quote left some doubt. What would the building look like when completed and how long would paint last? If the job was awarded to the lowest bidder, could we anticipate the life expectancy of the finished project to be equal or even close to that of the highest bidder?

Be careful of a low price, it maybe too good to be true

One of the other concerns seen regularly in the bidding process, is how some of the lower end bidders rely on "extras" to make the job profitable for themselves. An extra is an item or surface that was missed in the original scope of work that when added after the fact will typically cost more per square foot to complete. Unfortunately, some contractors have developed quite the knack to identify a poorly written specification that will require extra work.

Even In the best of projects extras sometimes happen. In those cases having someone with the knowledge to provide oversight further ensures that the charges for the extra work are in line with best practices and are in the financial interest of the project owners.

The above examples reveal just how important it is to have an independent specification with project oversight to ensure the right product is used and that it is applied properly.

Delaying a paint project

In most multi-family repaint projects the risk of imminent structural failure is not high and in most cases, putting off a residential repaint for "one more season" is often a calculated decision where budgets are concerned. A consultation from a certified coatings inspector can assess the risk of delaying a project for another year and identify issues that may result from doing so.

The deterioration of a paint system often appears to be a gradual process that most people will not even notice until the surfaces starts to show water and sun damage evidenced by peeling and cracks in the finish. A qualified inspector can provide an estimate of what can wait or what needs to be completed without delay.

When the decision is made to repaint, the first question to ask is, should we hire a consultant? In almost all cases the answer should be yes. The independence and impartiality of a consultant adds a significant level of expertise to a project. A project that is done with inspection will typically last twice as long as a project done without inspection.

Pricing

Often a specification will be prepared before the final determination has been made to move forward on a repaint project. The specification can be used to establish a preliminary budget for the project and the normal cost for the preparation of a specification by a qualified consultant is \$500.

A bid tour should also be conducted by the qualified consultant, which brings all the perspective bidders to the site for a review of the specification, and a walk through of the proposed project. Bid tours are typically priced at \$200.

For inspection on a project, a qualified consultant will normally charge 5% of the paint contract (materials and labor). The cost of the consultant's fees are often included by the paint contractors when they submit their bid. Regardless the cost of this added expertise is almost always offset with an increase in value to the project.

Establishing Quality as a Priority

Paint contractors that focus on doing quality work as priority are very protective of their reputation and prefer to have an independent coatings inspector involved. This is because it ensures a level playing field for bidding, and limits the chances of confusion that could lead to a misunderstanding or mistakes in the project. Independent inspection further reduces liability concerns for the owners, applicator and even the product manufacturer.

A consultant brings a consistent process to a project which includes:

- Assessing and documenting the surface conditions of the structure.
- Noting of any surface damage that will need to be repaired before painting.
- Determine the existing coating condition and issues that may impact repainting process.
- Writing a project specific specification which documents the preparation procedure for the various substrates including the requirements for cleaning and priming of each surface.
- Specify the coating system to be used which includes the number of coats to be applied.
- Assist in the bidding process as required by the owners.

- Once the project starts, the inspector will monitor the job process and report on observations to ensure the surfaces are properly prepared and the new paint is applied well under the correct conditions.
- Progress and final reports are sent to the building owner, property manager and contractor.

In Summary

To get the best on your next repaint project;

- Hire an independent and qualified paint inspector to write a project specific specification and provide inspection through all phases of the project.
- Secure bids from three qualified contractors who have industry credentials such as the MPI Accredited Contractor program and are willing to provide references for past work.
- Request the contractor to issue a two-year performance bond for labor and materials.

By hiring reputable tradesmen with clearly articulated specifications and further ensuring they are administered by the independent third party expert, you can be assured that your next paint project will go very well.

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