CONSTRUCTION RISK CHECKLIST > During-construction > Monitor Subcontractor Performance

Don't Assume the Work Is Right. Verify It.

Most subcontractors take pride in their work and want to deliver a quality result. However, even the best subcontractors can misunderstand the scope, miss details or make mistakes.

The reality is that if a problem is discovered after linings are installed, concrete is poured or finishes are completed, the cost of rectification can increase dramatically. In many cases, the builder remains responsible to the client, regardless of which trade performed the work.

That's why monitoring subcontractor performance is one of the most important risk management activities on any residential construction project.

The objective is not to micromanage trades or second-guess specialists. The objective is to ensure that work is completed in accordance with the agreed scope, plans, specifications and quality expectations before the next stage of work proceeds.

Subcontractor Performance Monitoring Checklist

Before signing off a stage of work, make sure you can answer "Yes" to the following:

1. **Was the scope of work clearly communicated before work commenced?**
2. **Has the work been completed in accordance with the plans and specifications?**
3. **Have any variations been documented and approved?**
4. **Have required inspections been completed?**
5. **Has the work been checked before it becomes concealed?**
6. **Have any defects or non-conformances been identified and rectified?**
7. **Have photographs or records been retained where appropriate?**
8. **Has the subcontractor met programme and sequencing requirements?**
9. **Have quality expectations been achieved?**

10. **Has the work been formally accepted before the next trade proceeds?**

One of the biggest mistakes builders make is assuming that no news is good news. A lack of complaints does not necessarily mean the work is correct. Regular inspections during construction are often far more effective than discovering issues at practical completion.

Particular attention should be given to work that will later become hidden. Framing, bracing, waterproofing, drainage, insulation, structural connections and services should all be inspected before they are covered by subsequent work. Once concealed, defects become more difficult and expensive to identify and rectify.

Builders should also establish quality expectations at the beginning of the project. The subcontractor should understand not only what work is required, but the standard to which it is expected to be completed. Plans, specifications, manufacturer requirements and applicable standards should all form part of this discussion.

Documentation can also be a valuable tool. Site photos, inspection records, producer statements, test results and quality assurance checklists can provide evidence that work was reviewed and accepted at the appropriate stage.

Importantly, monitoring does not mean the builder must become an expert in every trade. A builder may not be qualified to assess every technical aspect of electrical, plumbing or engineering work. However, they can verify that the correct specialists have completed the work, required inspections have occurred and any necessary certifications have been obtained.

The most successful builders understand that quality control is not a single event at the end of the project. It is a process that occurs throughout construction.

Because the cheapest defect to fix is the one identified before the next trade starts work. And the best way to protect quality is not to assume the work is right, it is to verify it.