

Avoiding Delays Due to Fire Suppression System Work

By Dick Cowan, Clark & Sullivan Builders

The Division of the State Architect has recently issued Bulletin 07-04 warning of the risk if an installed fire suppression system were to differ from what had been approved and reminding us of its authority to stop work to protect student safety. The risk of installation differing from the approved system exists for California school projects because fire suppressions systems, sprinklers and kitchen hoods usually require deferred approval by DSA, and the schedule of rough in work for these systems occurs early in the project.

Many districts, architects, and CM's have concerns about the risk of delay to projects if ordering, fabrication, manufacturing, shipment and installation of these systems occurs after formal DSA deferred approval. Districts and architects aren't eager to accept the risk of designing these systems before bidding, since the skill to design these systems resides with specialty firms which both engineer and install them.

Therefore, project teams often schedule the installation of these systems to occur at contractor risk prior to approval. The contractor then bears the financial risk if the installed system must be corrected to match the approval.

Here are some best practices to minimize the risk of delay due to noncompliant installation of fire suppression systems.

1. Ensure fire flow and hydraulic data is collected early. DSA is now requiring this information at backcheck of initial plans. Including this data as part of the fire suppression system bid specification will speed the process.

2. Make the submission to the architect and DSA as soon as possible in the project. If using an alternate delivery method, award fire suppression work early and make the design either part of the initial plan submission to DSA or an early system increment for DSA approval. Caution; don't run afoul of the rule against awarding construction contracts until stamp-out.
3. Follow the Fire and Life Safety Automatic Fire Sprinkler Submittal Guideline available from DSA. The checklist is more extensive than it used to be. Hold a planning meeting or phone call among Fire Suppression System Designer, Architect of Record, and Project Inspector. Clarify who will provide what data to the submission to DSA.
4. Expedite the approval by the Architect of Record and Structural and Mechanical Subconsultants and subsequent transmittal to DSA.
5. Once submission is made to DSA, ask for an approval target date, and ask to see that the submittal is on Tracker. Check in with the reviewer and on Tracker frequently.
6. Keep the Project Inspector and Architect of Record informed of progress, questions, and any submission returns asking for corrections.
7. If progress on review or backcheck is not as promised, involve the DSA Regional Manager to get things right.

8. Ask for an over-the-counter backcheck if backcheck is required.
9. If the project schedule requires that Fire Suppression work start before DSA approval, let the DSA Field Engineer, the Project Inspector, the Architect of Record and the district staff know. There may be only minor clarifications being made. If DSA sees major issues with the system proposed, they will let you know.
10. It's OK if the project inspector wants to record a Deviation Notice that work began before approval. The deviation can be cleared once approval is received.
11. DSA leaders state that the authority to stop work will only be employed in cases where major issues create a risk to future student safety, not merely where paperwork is slower than desired.

— Dick Cowan is with Clark & Sullivan Builders and a board member of the Association of California Construction Managers

Message From The Chair

Continued from page 2

others who have served our organization well. This conference will be packed with many educational opportunities for all C.A.S.H. members. As I look forward to my second term as Chair, I will be calling upon many of you to assist this powerful organization in moving forward with our goals. I look forward to welcoming you to the Annual Conference in Sacramento in late February. 