

What to Look for When Hiring an Irrigation Contractor



☑ Insurance: Written proof of current Workers Compensation Board (WCB) and liability insurance.

Ensure that the dates on the policy are current and they carry a minimum \$1M in general liability insurance. Hiring a Contractor that is not in compliance with provincial regulations makes the owner (you) liable if there are injuries on site or damage to yours or your neighbour's property.

☑ Contract: Contracts should clearly state the project details including:

- The scope of the project, including the specific area of the project and expected end result.
- When the project will start and how long it will take to complete.
- Contractor responsibilities (see below for details).

A signed contract provides you with a tool to hold a Contractor accountable for delays, missed items and cost overruns.

☑ Contractor responsibilities:

Contractor responsibilities should include:

- Locating underground utilities
- Any required local government permits
- Informing you of any issues encountered like project cost increases with a time allowance for you to respond before the Contractor goes ahead with changes/purchases if there is a major difference in cost or outcome of project.
- Turf/surrounding landscape repairs due to equipment damage to lawns could be included as the Contractor's responsibility, but this may increase the cost so you may want to manage those items yourself.

☑ References:

Ask for a minimum of two references that you can contact directly. If a contractor is unable to produce a reference, consider why this may be the case.

☑ Training

The Irrigation Industry Association of B.C. offers certification courses for Irrigation Technicians (CIT), Designers (CID), Contractors (CIC), and Schedulers (CIS). A list of contractors who have successfully completed training is available here: www.irrigationbc.com. A new training program, Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper (www.qwel.net), is being piloted in the Okanagan so you may soon see more Contractors with the QWEL credentials.

For additional information, contact the RDNO WaterWise program at waterwise@rdno.ca or call 250-550-3700.

What to Look for in an Irrigation Design



Once you have selected a Contractor, here are some design elements to discuss...

Available Flow and Pressure

In order to design and install an irrigation system that will perform as expected, a Contractor should know how much water per minute (site flow) and how much pressure is available. These are generally expressed as gallons per minute (gpm) or litres per minute (lpm) for flow, and pounds per square inch (psi) for pressure. Ask your Contractor for this information and make a record of it as it can be helpful if you ever need to repair / change the system.

Sprinkler Coverage

Sprinklers installed to irrigate lawn (turfgrass) areas should be installed to achieve head to head coverage. What this means is that the spray from one sprinkler ends at, or just beyond, where the next sprinkler is installed. If this does not occur, there may be mushy areas, brown areas, or both due to uneven water coverage.

Irrigation Zones

Irrigation zones are areas of your yard that are irrigated at the same time. Irrigation zones should include only one type of irrigation (i.e. rotor or spray head sprinklers, dripline, or micro-jet) and should irrigate plant material with similar water requirements. This is called "hydro-zoning" or matching plant water needs. For instance, an irrigation zone should not include sprinklers for turfgrass as well as driplines for shrubs, all operating at once.

Valve Boxes

Valve boxes are the green boxes that are installed below ground as part of the irrigation system. These should be installed so that the lid is flush with the ground. The boxes house valves and sometimes filters that you may need to access for annual maintenance or repairs, so these items need to be inside the valve box with sufficient space between them. For instance, the filter will need space so that it can be unscrewed and cleaned at least once a year. Lining the box with landscape fabric or crushed rock, or both, will help keep things tidy.

Irrigation Controller

The controller; or timer; will be programmed to turn on your system automatically. Ask your Contractor to explain the type of controller being installed and why it was selected. Be sure to ask for the instruction manual also. There are indoor rated and outdoor rated controllers; do not install an indoor controller outside as it will void the warranty. Many controllers have a "season adjust" feature that allows you to adjust irrigation run times, by percentages for cooler and hotter times of the year. Weather-based controller will automatically adjust the irrigation schedule based on historical or current weather conditions.

As Built Drawing

Request that your Contractor provide you with a zone guide indicating what yard area each zone irrigates. This is best done through an Irrigation As Built Drawing that shows the location of your sprinklers, valves, and underground irrigation pipe. This will be very helpful for system repairs and/or future yard renovations.

Safety

Request that your contractor install the following:

- Back flow prevention to lower the risk of contaminating the drinking water supply with soil or chemicals.
- A master valve connected to a flow sensor so that your system will shut off automatically in the event of a break. It is also very important to know where your manual master shut off is.

For other gardening tips and a list of water wise plants to further you water efficient landscaping, please refer to the RDNO **Waterwise Gardening & Irrigation Handbook** provided.