



The **Hazard Evaluation and Emergency Response (HEER) Office** is part of the Hawai'i Department of Health's Environmental Health Administration whose mission is to protect human health and the environment. The HEER Office provides leadership, support, and partnership in preventing, planning for, responding to, and enforcing environmental laws relating to releases or threats of releases of hazardous substances.

Choosing an Environmental Consultant

Selecting an environmental consultant can be a daunting task. For those that do not have day-to-day experience with soil, groundwater, and soil vapor contamination, it is very difficult to evaluate the differences between consultants. **But selecting the right consultant for your situation is an important decision and it should not be taken lightly.** Hiring a consultant that does not have the skills and experience to address your specific needs, or is not knowledgeable of the regulatory guidance specific to Hawaii, may lead to added countless hours and dollars wasted, possibly causing significant delays to your project.

When do I need an environmental consultant?

The HEER Office has the responsibility and legal authority to respond to releases, threats of releases, or discoveries of hazardous substances, pollutants, and contaminants, in accordance with Hawaii Revised Statutes 128D and Hawaii Administrative Rules 11-451. **If you are a property owner or operator at a site where a known or suspected release of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant has been identified, you are required to meet your environmental obligations in accordance with Hawaii Law.** If you do not have the in-house expertise to meet your environmental obligations, you may need to hire an environmental consultant.

How do I find environmental consultants?

It is helpful to determine your scope of work to the best of your ability prior to contacting an environmental consultant. Providing each prospective consultant with as much information as possible about environmental conditions and any proposed redevelopment at your site will enable each prospective consultant to give you more accurate estimates (cost and time) for completing the project. Some tips to help in your search for a consultant include:



- Talk with other business colleagues who have similar projects/needs to see if any have hired a consultant. Ask about their experience and whether the consultant met expectations and deadlines.
- Contact your trade or business associations to see if they have a list of consultants.
- Talk with your lending or investing institutions to discuss their requirements, expectations and experience with various environmental consultants.
- Use online search engines to find consultants in your area. Many environmental consultants specialize in different areas, so using search terms such as "remediation, site investigation, construction oversight" may help narrow down the list of consultants who may meet your needs

Can HDOH recommend a consultant?

No. Because of our role as a regulatory agency and potential conflicts of interest, HDOH cannot recommend specific consultants or firms to you. However, you may contact the HEER Office if you have questions about site assessment procedures and remediation options to be considered when developing the scope of work that you will provide to prospective consultants.



Evaluating environmental consultants

Once you have compiled a list of potential consultants you should evaluate both their cost proposal **and** their qualifications for your specific project. Selecting a consultant based solely on the lowest price may lead to additional costs and delays (i.e., change orders and additional sampling to satisfy regulatory requirements) if they do not have the experience to properly estimate or conduct a project similar in scope to yours. A better decision-making process is to determine how many projects the consultant has worked on that are similar to yours, and how they performed on these projects.

Some questions to ask the environmental consultants when evaluating their capabilities:

- How many projects of similar scope they have worked on, and what was the outcome?
 - Ask for specific names of sites/projects. You can use the HDOH iHEER system to review files for a specific site and assess work previously performed by the consultant.
- What are their qualifications for your project?
 - For example, if your project includes property re-development, do they have sufficient experience conducting environmental oversight during construction?
 - Certain remedial projects also require environmental consultants with other specialties (e.g., lead or asbestos abatement, a certified industrial hygienist, etc.), and in some cases consultants with this type of specialized expertise may not have expertise in other types of environmental work.
- How do they see the project proceeding? Do they have a schedule outlining the general steps?
- How long will it take them to prepare the appropriate documents and how long will it take for the regulatory agencies to review these documents?
 - Typically, HDOH will take at least 30 days to review a document; however, this is dependent upon workload. This should be taken into consideration when preparing the timeline for your project.
- How long will it take to conduct field work?
- Ask for references from previous projects they have worked on.

Be careful not to compare apples to oranges. If the cost estimates from different consultant vary drastically but the number of samples collected or documents provided also varies significantly, ask for an explanation (e.g., are they providing a Sampling Plan, and collecting Multi-Incremental samples?). Ask if their plan is consistent with procedures described in the HEER Office Technical Guidance Manual (TGM). You may also contact the HEER Office to ask if a proposed plan appears to be adequate and appropriate for the site.

Benefits to selecting an appropriate and qualified environmental consultant for your project

Skills, experience, and track records of consultants vary widely. Hiring an appropriate and qualified environmental consultant can lead to the following benefits:

- Saving time and money
- Completing projects satisfactorily the first time
- Maintaining good relationships with regulatory agencies
- Submitting deliverables in a timely fashion
- Satisfying all parties involved with the final outcome

It is important to remember that when you employ the services of a consultant to assist you in meeting your environmental obligations, you still remain responsible for compliance with those obligations. Therefore, it is important to select a qualified environmental consultant for your project, as failure to do so could lead to violations of environmental rules and regulations, which may include fines.

Additional Resources

- HDOH iHeer Information and User Instructions
 - <https://health.hawaii.gov/heer/siteinfo/iheer-information/>
- HDOH HEER Office website
 - <https://health.hawaii.gov/heer>

