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Delegated Design in the Utility Construction Industry

A brief overview of the concept, benefits, and drawbacks



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What is delegated design?

Delegated design is a process in which the design responsibility for certain building components or systems is transferred from the architect or engineer of record to a general contractor. This means that the design professional does not specify the details of the component or system but rather sets the performance criteria and design parameters that the delegated designer must follow. The delegated designer then submits the shop drawings, calculations, and specifications for review and/or approval by the design professional.

Why is delegated design used?

Delegated design is used for various reasons, such as:

- Reducing the design fees and liability of the design professional
- It may expedite the project schedule by allowing concurrent design and fabrication
- Utilizing the expertise and innovation of a specialty contractor or supplier/fabricator
- Improving the quality and performance of the component or system by applying the latest standards and technologies

What are the pros and cons of delegated design?

Delegated design has some advantages and disadvantages, depending on the perspective of the project stakeholders. Some of the pros and cons are:

PROS

- **Cost savings:** Delegated design can lower the initial design fees and reduce the orders and claims by avoiding errors and conflicts in the design documents.
- **Time savings:** Delegated design can shorten the design and construction duration by allowing parallel activities and faster delivery of components or systems.
- **Quality and performance:** Delegated design can improve the quality and performance of the components or systems by leveraging the specialized knowledge and experience of the delegated designers.

CONS

- **Risk and liability:** Delegated design can increase the risk and liability of the design professional and the owner by transferring the design responsibility to a third party that may not have the same qualifications, standards, or insurance coverage. To mitigate this issue, it is recommended that clear roles and responsibilities be defined by the project design professional.
- **Coordination and communication:** Delegated design can create coordination and communication challenges among the project team members, especially if the delegated design scope, schedule, and deliverables are not clearly defined and agreed upon. Lack of communication and coordination can result in increased costs or an inability to properly price items.
- **Quality control and assurance:** Delegated design can compromise the quality control and assurance of the components or systems by relying on the delegated designer's self-certification and verification, which may not be consistent or adequate.
- **Delegated designs may cause a level of uncertainty with the contractor if the design cannot be done prior to bid, potentially increasing price to the owner.**

Examples of Typical/Acceptable Delegated Design Scopes of Work

- Conduit / Raceways:
- Miscellaneous Metals
- Process Equipment
- Pre-engineered Buildings
- Lightning Protection
- Prestressed Concrete Tanks
- Water Storage Tanks (Ground, Elevated)
- Temporary Excavation Shoring and Support
- Temporary Bypass Pumping
- Temporary Dewatering
- Concrete Formwork
- Precast Concrete (manholes, vaults, site light bases, etc.)
- Fire Alarm Systems
- Security Systems

Examples of Atypical Delegated Design Scopes of Work

- Seismic Design
- Anchor Bolt Design
- Cast-in-place Concrete Site Light Bases
- Sizing of Precast Electrical Manholes and Handholes
- Coordination studies for electrical gear
- Pipe Expansion/Contraction
- Pipe Supports

Best Practices/Summary/Conclusion

- Project design engineers should define clear roles and responsibilities related to delegated design items.
- Delegated design requiring only the services of a third-party designer (with no related product) may not be appropriate if part of the permanent facility.
- Careful consideration should be given to the scope of services prior to assigning them for delegated design as to the cost and impact of the final product.
- Careful consideration and communication between the project owner and engineer should occur to determine the scope and items to be delegated to a third party.