



By: Dave Frank

State Farm Finds Insurance Through CIMS

Leading U.S. firm uses Standard to ensure contractors deliver consistent, quality services.

If anyone knows about the challenges of pre-qualifying and selecting the best building service contractors it is Steve Spencer, facilities specialist for State Farm Insurance.

Spencer, who is responsible for overseeing facilities services contracts for approximately 2,500 owned and leased buildings in the U.S. and Canada, totaling more than 30 million square feet, works very hard to ensure State Farm buildings are cleaned by consistent, high-quality building service contractors (BSCs).

His pre-qualifying process goes beyond cost per square foot.

Understanding the time and effort involved in hiring contractors to clean buildings and eager to make the job easier, Spencer took the opportunity to join the standard-development Technical Committee for ISSA's Cleaning Industry Management Standard (CIMS).

An early supporter and contributor to the Standard, Spencer looks at CIMS as a long-overdue, yet valuable tool in selecting a contractor.

This is how it works: Contractors can become CIMS-certified by proving that their organization meets the elements of the Standard with data, documentation and demonstration in the five principle areas.

Spencer, who now requires that all new contractors hired by State Farm are CIMS-certified or certified within six months, says the Standard has made his job easier by pre-qualifying contractors.

"The CIMS certification program has cut down on my time tremendously," Spencer says. "Nothing is fool-proof, but when I see that a contractor is CIMS-certified, I know that they're already at a certain point. They've definitely got a leg up."

The Old Way

Before CIMS existed, Spencer had to do all of the pre-qualification legwork for each contractor applying for the opportunity to bid on State Farm buildings.

He still does a lot of that work if the contractor applying is not CIMS-certified, but is willing to pursue certification.

"Before even allowing contractors to bid on our buildings, we often visit their current customers' buildings to evaluate cleanliness," Spencer says. "I also look at each contractor's training and hiring practices, how management is structured, health and safety policies and quality systems. I spend a lot of time doing that."

The pre-bid process, which includes documenting building data and any changes to building requirements, takes four to six weeks.

He uses a workloading program to workload the building up for bid.

The program provides him with baseline figures, including the number of hours it will take to clean the building and approximate-

ly how much it should cost to clean the building.

He creates a spreadsheet of all the numbers, including monthly cleaning and all alternates, cost per square foot, cost per month, cost per year and so on.

Meanwhile, Spencer starts to accept qualification applications from contractors.

Choosing the wrong contractor would be a costly mistake.

So for each building, Spencer conducts a deep analysis of the building and each contractor's bid documents to ensure that the building and the contractor are a match.

It is up to each building's administrative services supervisor and manager to select each contractor, so Spencer makes them a list of positives as well as a list of drawbacks about each contractor.

"I might note that a contractor performs background checks and they have a good quality control program, which are positives," Spencer says. "Some examples of drawbacks [include] training is limited to on-the-job training or they use acid bowl cleaner."

It is in this part of the process that CIMS can help save time by ensuring certified contractors meet the basic elements in each of the five principles: Quality systems; service delivery; human resources; health, safety and environmental stewardship; and management commitment.

Making A Difference

Of the six or seven CIMS-certified contractors State Farm is already working with, administrative services have noticed a significant difference between certified contractors and non-certified ones.

"They've told me that CIMS contractors are more organized, run their operations smoother and never have problems with billing," Spencer notes. "The principles of service delivery, quality systems and human resources really stand out. The planning, how they approach the customer, lack of turnover, the way they communicate and the consistency is what really makes a difference."

In the time he's now saving, Spencer is working to educate others inside and outside his organization about CIMS.

"I like to get the word out so people know CIMS can give your organization an advantage if utilized properly," concludes Spencer. "It elevates the industry as more contractors and in-house organizations get certified. I'd like to see the industry get to the point where no one gets an account unless they are CIMS-certified. That's what's going to raise the bar for the industry." *CM*

David Frank is a 30-year industry veteran and the president of the American Institute for Cleaning Science. AICS is the registrar for the ISSA Cleaning Industry Management Standards certification program.