

Introduction

Many small or careless errors in project estimation, documentation and education can be silently waiting for the alignment of the right set of circumstances to create what may be a catastrophic company-ending issue.

Here is a list of some of the ills that may be endangering your employees, customers and, ultimately, your company. If you recognize any of these errors, omissions and shortcomings as ones you may have committed, it should give you pause. Some may simply cause you stress; however, others will directly equate to loss of profit.

Source: Greg Kessinger is SD&I's fire alarm and codes expert & a regular contributor <https://www.securityinfowatch.com/article/124269-86/little-mistakes-can-be-big-trouble>

Errors on Estimates and Proposals

1. Failure to include the cost of the permit/plan inspection fees. When quoting a job, stipulate who will be paying these fees – you or the customer. You could even make it an item the customer has to initial when they accept your proposal. These run hundreds of dollars (sometimes thousands), so it is not something you want to forget, or decide at a later date.
2. Failure to ask for the ongoing test and inspection contract. This is the cherry on top of the sundae that makes your new fire alarm job an even more lucrative asset. In addition to the profit, you will be back in the building at least every year, which may enable you to witness building expansions early and provide additional services you may have missed out on.
3. Omitting the costs for underground cables and required lightning protection. Both of these items are required at each end of an outdoor fire alarm circuit, and they should be included in the total price estimate to your customer. At each point where a circuit enters or leaves another building, a lightning arrestor is required – either overhead or underground. The lightning arrestor must be UL “fire alarm” Listed under #497B.
4. There is no clause in your contract that clearly states that if anyone changes the project in any way, then the cost to the customer will be adjusted to reflect the change. Anything that alters your parts or labor must be accounted for by a payment adjustment or you'll be nicked and dimed to the point that all you do is worry, and spend time trying to identify and address all the changes.

Documentation Errors

1. Failure to provide the required paperwork and tags. It can cost a mere \$10 to get it right the first time (visit www.FireAlarm.org for more information).
2. Failure to provide a Test Plan and/or a statement describing what you will be testing and what you are not testing. Let's say, for example, that you are testing the activation of a smoke detector and relay – you do not want the customer to think that systems or equipment of other trades are included, such as HVAC or elevator controls.
3. As-built or “record drawings” are not provided for each and every job. When you turn in submittals to the Plan Approval Department, you provide four or five (perhaps six) copies – but minimally according whatever the jurisdiction requires. They will, however, stamp as many as you provide for the same fee. Submit as many as you need to keep one or two approved copies in your office, and another on the job site, per NFPA 72. Your installer should pencil on that copy, any notes and little changes that were made. Combine and transfer all these changes to the clean office sets and these become the as-builts that you will have to provide the customer and the AHJ at the Final Acceptance Test.
4. The person providing your plans does not indicate on the submittal drawings which devices and appliances that are to be considered as “supplementary.” Examples of a supplementary device would be an outdoor audible appliance indicating sprinkler waterflow that also includes a flashing strobe light; or, strobes added to work areas such as warehouses or other strictly-work areas. Smoke detectors – except the one at the FACP – are usually supplementary in buildings where no one is sleeping..