

Punch List Expectations

The punch list is one of the most important tools in closing out a job. However, punch lists often get a bad rap. Some project managers feel that if the general contractor were doing their job, there would be no need for a punch list. Others feel that some general contractors push too many items to the punch list, so they can come back and finish the work later while allowing their workers to move on to another project. As a result, the punch list becomes a nagging source of aggravation for both the facility manager and the general contractor.

The worst case scenario is when a punch list is identified and the contractor does not finish the list in a timely manner, or not at all. Granted, there can be extenuating circumstances, such as back ordered products or equipment damaged during shipping, etc. but, for the most part, the punch list should be completed in a relatively short period of time and good communication between the facility manager and the contractor should remain ongoing.

The reality of the situation is there will be always be some punch list items left to do. The nature of construction is that it brings together many different materials, combined with many different types of workers, creating situations in which a few corrections may be necessary. When the final punch list is compiled, it's an opportunity to view the project through different sets of eyes. It's also an opportunity to demonstrate that no detail is too small or too large.

Jim Means, from Ameritech Cellular, said, "...the punch list can be one of the best marketing tools for a general contractor. It is a focus point for closing out the job, and is an opportunity to leave everyone with a good impression." Without going into an in-depth analysis of punch lists, the following guidelines should provide a basis for both the facility manager and the general contractor in terms of mutual expectations.

- Pre-punch list inspection: As work is completed, each portion of the work should receive a pre-punch list inspection by the general contractor prior to project close out and final punch list. This really helps in the overall process as it helps to ensure that work be completely finished before the project teams leave, thereby greatly minimizing the final punch list items.

- The final occupancy date: The final occupancy date should always be kept in mind as the project proceeds, and those items that must be corrected for occupancy purposes should be focused upon to minimize any occupancy problems and inconvenience to the building manager.
- No scope changes: The punch list is one of the final elements for project completion and is not a time for scope changes. If the scope changes, then this must be addressed as a separate issue from the main punch list.
- Technology: Punch lists should be generated using integrated construction project management software. This way, nothing is missed as the punch list is customized for that particular project. The punch list can also be sorted a number of different ways, with places for signatures by the various trades when an item is completed.
- Teamwork: Include members of the different trades on the final punch list inspection. This improves the communication process and gives the different trades, whose work may affect each other, a chance to figure out the best way to correct a particular problem.

The punch list is an important part of the facility manager's responsibility and one in which the contractor can really help. Without question, the punch list allows the general contractor to demonstrate they are part of the facility manager's team, and they will do anything to help everyone feel comfortable on the day of occupancy. Doing so reflects upon the contractor's commitment to their client. The punch list is more than a list of things to do – it's an opportunity to exceed expectations.

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