

Is One RFI One Too Many?

Executive Summary. How many RFIs (requests for information) are too many on a construction project? Is it time, is it possible, to tie the number of RFIs on a job to the cost impact suffered by a contractor?



What is an RFI? “RFI” is an acronym standing for Request for Information. It is a common document to nearly every construction project of any value and duration. It is a tool used by a contractor to receive clarification on the construction of a project – usually this is a request for clarification on the plans or in the specification. Sometimes a project has near zero, and sometimes RFIs number in the thousands. Sometimes they are small and of little consequence, and sometimes they are damning to a contractor’s schedule and/or cost.

One is too many? A question over the decades has been how many are too many? RFIs that is. The real question is “what is the maximum number of RFIs on this project that can be written and answered, that doesn’t impact the contractor in time or cost?”

Nope, no contingency. I love when I hear this from an owner during a project with an excessive number of changes: “well, you have that in your contingency” [referring to the shortfalls in the design and the resultant RFIs during the project]. Any contractor that must win by low bid, has only what’s in the Contract Documents. There is no contingency for the designer not doing his/her job; that’s why designers carry errors and omissions insurance. I still haven’t seen CML (Cover My Loss) insurance or CDM (Cover Designers’ Mistakes) insurance for contractors.

Would you participate? So, here I am at 35,000’ getting ready to descend into Chicago O’Hare and I’m wondering – if I asked you to help me gather data to make a tie between your RFIs and the time and cost impacts to your project, would you let me in? Would you let me into your construction documentation logs, your financials, your job cost reports, and your estimates to try to establish a defensible link between the number of RFIs and the impact to your project? It’d be my goal to come up with a simple graph and/or formula to tie your loss to the number of times you’re asking the designer for clarification. Please email me at sj@sjcivil.com or call/text me a (808) 271-5150. See my website, I’m a former contractor trying to help contractors quickly and equitably resolve disputes.



My story. I've been thinking about how to gather this data, how to analyze this data, and how to package this data in an easy-to-use method for dispute resolution. For years. As a construction professional and then company owner, it was always frustrating for me to watch garbage hit the street for me to bid and then suffer all the way through the project trying to make a buck. Yes, sometimes this was lucrative, but always stressful and, frankly, unnecessary. A black eye to the professional engineering industry. I hope you'll email me or

respond to our survey and give me your thoughts on this.