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## Effectively Managing Restoration & Remediation Projects: Lessons from Cajun Country

Wynn L. White, PE

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Today, we welcomed Wynn L. White, PE for a discussion on managing large restoration and remediation projects particularly after hurricanes and water damage events.

Wynn is a second generation civil engineer. Wynn's early work included a variety of civil engineering projects that included water, wastewater, subdivision layout, and road projects. Wynn went on to become a licensed sewage treatment plant operator, where he learned what really works (and what doesn't) for his future projects. Wastewater brought Wynn to

Louisiana in 1980. Since 1987, e has worked on hundreds of environmental projects and has been the principal-in-charge on over 2,000 projects. His firm conducted more asbestos inspections and developed more asbestos management plans for schools than any other firm in Louisiana.



Mr. White has also served as an expert witness in numerous legal cases and

brings a real world perspective to his thoughts on managing restoration and remediation projects.

### **Nuggets mined from today's show:**

***How and why did you enter the mold field?*** Wynn entered the mold field through his prior asbestos consulting work. As the asbestos guru of Louisiana and expert witness work, he was called upon by attorneys to sample for mold. He asked the attorneys if they could see mold and smell mold that was confirmation that they had mold. If they were willing to pay him to sample for mold he would oblige.

### ***What tips would you give contractors and consultants aspiring to work for school districts and institutional clients?***

- You need trained, experienced and properly equipped staff to do what the clients need done.
- First get the best education you and your staff can.
- Then expand through your current client base.
- Team-up with local contractors. In disaster zones, temporary labor firms may pick up workers in Home Depot parking lots. These workers are untrained, unfamiliar with safety rules and may not speak English. Remember to help them protect themselves and our client.

***Do most of your school district and institutional clients preselect restoration contractors and have them written into their disaster contingency plans?*** Many don't have written disaster recovery plans. Often, they rely upon the insurance adjuster for a recommendation. They may get stuck with an insurance adjuster who does not have the policyholder's best interest at heart.

***From what sources does the money come to pay for hurricane and storm losses?*** Cash, insurance proceeds and FEMA. Some contractors are awaiting FEMA payments for work done last August. He tells new clients upfront that they bill every 30 days and expect to be paid, if that is a problem we aren't a good fit.

**Tip!!! Contract documents?** Wynn uses Documents published by the Engineers Joint Contract Documents Committee (EJCDC®) specifically written for infrastructure projects in the United States. Delivered in user friendly MSWord, EJCDC documents are a cost effective solution that can be customized to suit your project. <https://www.ejcdc.org/>

**Tip!!! Bid work?**

- Projects in excess of \$250,000+ must be advertised in Louisiana. In the state, he has four contractors that he works with.
- Large FEMA projects are prevailing wage (Davis Bacon).
- In hard hit Lake Charles, it's tough for contractors to find accommodations and local skilled and unskilled workers.
- Many locals are working on damage to their own homes and unavailable for work.
- *Only rodeo veterans need apply.* Contractors need to be experienced and know what they bidding on.
- Recommends pre-bidding work in advance of hurricane season. It's important to do a good job estimating quantities first.
- May be able to obtain estimated quantities from prior loss information. Contractors may try and manipulate the unit costs and improve margins on extras.
- Consultants don't have Xray vision. His contracts have unforeseen site condition clauses.
- Look at the building and be aware of potential hazards, check for asbestos, lead, mercury, PCBs, etc. Lock out/Tag out very important.
- Lead, asbestos and mold contractors must be licensed in Louisiana.
- Anyone who can spell mold can be a consultant in Louisiana.
- Sometimes we need to throttle back the contractors.
- Firm rule: never remove undamaged materials without client approval.

**Tip!!! FEMA work?** Working for FEMA requires significant paperwork. Be prepared to digitally resubmit the paperwork multiple times.

**Clerk of the works?** A clerk of the works (CoW) is employed by an insurance company, architect, or client on a construction site. The role is primarily to represent the interests of the client in regard to ensuring that the quality of

both materials and workmanship are in accordance with the design information such as specifications and drawings in addition to recognized quality standards.

***Can asbestos removal firms do mold remediation?*** Yes, they know what to expect from a dust control vantagepoint. Contractors need to prepare, do their homework and have good superintendents and supervisors.

***Mistakes: client, contractor & consultant?***

- Client mistake- accepting unit price bid without quantities.
- Contractor mistake- 'systematic breakdown in scope', just because part of the roof was lost doesn't mean all of the ceiling tile in the building needs to be replaced.
- Consultant mistake- large project requires getting trained and experienced staff onsite with necessary equipment. Need good monitoring equipment. Is an advocate of Tramex® moisture meters. Staff need to know how to use the meters. Miscues: Saying that the meter read 50 means nothing or recommending terrazzo floors are wet and need to be removed when they don't.

***Building back better?*** Wynn is an advocate of water resistant drywall. FEMA doesn't pay for improvements. Wynn's firm provided engineering services for the LaHouse.

***Building Science, think belt and suspenders.***

- Homes have an exterior cladding system and a weather resistant barrier. The purpose of the exterior cladding is to shed water. When a water hose is directed at exterior brick veneer the water will pass through the brick and run down the interior side of the brick. It will hit the flashing and then run out the weep holes. Doors and windows are flashed with a weather resistant barrier behind.
- The V in HVAC is ventilation. Ventilation in Louisiana, we want more air blowing in than is sucking out, so conditioned dry air leaks out rather than wet exterior air leaking in. Recommends a dewpoint of 53°F. Dewpoints need to be controlled. In Louisiana, moisture isn't going

away. Most HVAC systems run off the thermostat. Wynn advocates HVAC systems incorporate dewpoint sensors.

***Building tightness. Buildings used to breathe, now we've tightened them up. How do we get our building to breathe?*** Would you prefer we use shoddy construction and leave out windows & doors? The buildings must breathe using proper Ventilation (the V in HVAC).

***Flooring problems based on moisture coming through the concrete slab?***

- Slab at grade with direct contact with moisture barrier.
- Moisture enters through perimeter edges.
- Concrete is a hard sponge. Stiff cement mix, Water/Cement ratio of 48%.
- During flooring installation, moisture temperature of air mix in space less than 10° difference with slab or need to run AC, fans and/or dehumidifiers.
- Consider the additional water contained in water-based adhesives.

**Final comments**

- \$20 million dollars of insurance coverage sounds like big money. \$20 million dollars of insurance coverage on a \$40 million dollar loss is a major shortfall.
- Insurance companies are more concerned about their interest rather than the policyholders.
- Just because you come from north of the Mason Dixon line doesn't mean that everyone in the south is dumb!
- Louisiana catastrophic losses it's not unusual to encounter critters.
- Communication on large losses is of utmost importance!

***Z-Man signing off***

***Trivia question:***

When and where was the first reference to a hurricane in what is now the USA?

Answer: hurricane struck near the mouth of Mississippi River in 1527.

Answered by Don Weeks, Ottawa, Ontario Canada