

27 Questions to Ask Before You Hire a Contractor in Alberta

A no-nonsense vetting checklist covering licensing, permits, insurance, soil & foundation risk, and the contract terms most homeowners never think to ask about — built for Calgary, Airdrie, Chestermere & Cochrane homeowners.

27

Issues & risk areas covered

7

Categories, from legal to site work

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Conversation that can save you \$1000s

Why this list exists

Most renovation and construction disputes in Alberta don't come from bad workmanship — they come from things nobody asked about up front: Is this contractor actually licensed and insured? Who's liable if a sub gets hurt? Is the soil on this lot going to shift the foundation? Is there asbestos behind that wall?

This guide gives you the exact questions to ask, the paperwork to request, and the red flags to watch for — organized the way we vet our own subcontractors at AM Builders.

1. Legal & Licensing

01 Business licensing & registration

Ask: What's your business registration number, and are you licensed in this specific municipality?

Red flag: Reluctance to share a registration number, or licensed in one city but working in another.

02 WCB coverage

Ask: Can you provide your WCB Alberta clearance letter, and do your subs carry their own coverage?

Red flag: "My guys are subcontractors so WCB doesn't apply" — often false, and it leaves you liable if someone is hurt on your property.

03 General liability & builder's risk insurance

Ask: What's your coverage limit, and can I be added as Additional Insured with a Certificate of Insurance?

Red flag: Coverage under \$2M for a major job, or refusal to name you as additional insured.

04 Subcontractor risk transfer

Ask: Do you collect a Certificate of Insurance and WCB clearance from every sub before they set foot on site?

Red flag: Verbal-only sub agreements with no insurance paperwork trail.

05 Builders' Lien Act compliance

Ask: How do you manage the 10% statutory holdback and lien releases from subs and suppliers?

Red flag: No mention of the holdback, or a push to skip it "to save time" — you can still be lienied even after paying the GC in full.

06 New Home Warranty (where applicable)

Ask: Is this project subject to Alberta New Home Warranty requirements, and which provider covers it?

Red flag: Contractor is unaware the requirement exists for the scope in question.

2. Permits & Code

07 Building permits & inspections

Ask: Which permits does this scope require, and who pulls them and when?

Red flag: "We can skip the permit to save time" — unpermitted work can be ordered torn out and voids insurance.

08 Alberta Building Code compliance

Ask: How do you stay current on code updates, and can you show a project that passed inspection first try?

Red flag: Can't explain basic requirements like egress window sizing or smoke/CO alarm placement.

09 Licensed trades for electrical, plumbing, gas & HVAC

Ask: Which licensed trade partners handle electrical, plumbing and gas — can I see their credentials?

Red flag: "My guy is basically an electrician" — this work legally requires a certified, permitted tradesperson.

3. Site & Structural

10 Frost depth & foundation design

Ask: What footing depth are you using for this region, per code or engineered?

Red flag: *Shallow deck or addition footings with no frost protection.*

11 Soil conditions & geotechnical risk

Ask: Has a geotechnical report been done, and how will you address expansive clay if present?

Red flag: *Skips soil testing on new builds or major foundation work — common cause of cracking in this region.*

12 Grading & drainage away from foundation

Ask: What's your plan for final grade slope and downspout discharge?

Red flag: *No grading plan, or downspouts discharging near the foundation — the #1 cause of basement water issues.*

13 Utility locates before excavation

Ask: Have you submitted an Alberta One-Call locate request before digging?

Red flag: *"We'll just dig carefully" — digging without locates is a safety hazard and a legal requirement.*

14 Structural changes & engineering

Ask: Will this scope need a stamped engineering drawing, and who is your engineer of record?

Red flag: *Proposes removing a load-bearing wall based on "experience" with no engineering involved.*

4. Building Science

15 Moisture management & mold prevention

Ask: How will you handle vapour barrier placement and ventilation, especially in a basement?

Red flag: *Plans to finish a basement with no ventilation plan mentioned.*

16 Asbestos & vermiculite (pre-1990 homes)

Ask: Will you test for asbestos and vermiculite before any demolition on an older home?

Red flag: *Skips testing "to save cost," or plans demo before results are back — a real health hazard.*

17 Radon mitigation

Ask: Will you rough-in radon mitigation during basement or foundation work?

Red flag: *No mention of radon at all — Alberta has elevated levels in many regions.*

18 WETT certification for wood-burning appliances

Ask: If this touches a fireplace or chimney, is your installer WETT certified?

Red flag: *Alters a fireplace or chimney with no WETT-certified installer involved.*

19 Energy code & insulation requirements

Ask: What insulation values will you use to meet current code minimums?

Red flag: *"Whatever was there before" with no check against current requirements.*

5. Contract & Financial

20 Fixed price vs. cost-plus clarity

Ask: Is this fixed-price or cost-plus, and how exactly are change orders priced and approved?

Red flag: *Verbal-only change orders, or extra work starting before anything is signed.*

21 Payment schedule & deposit limits

Ask: What's the payment schedule tied to, and what deposit are you requesting up front?

Red flag: *A request for 50%+ upfront, or a schedule not tied to verifiable milestones.*

22 Scope of work specificity

Ask: Can you give me an itemized scope with material allowances, not just a one-line estimate?

Red flag: *A one-page vague quote with no line-item breakdown.*

23 Seasonal & weather scheduling

Ask: How do you handle concrete pours or exterior work scheduled through Alberta's shoulder season?

Red flag: A winter concrete pour planned with no cold-weather protection mentioned.

24 Site safety plan & OH&S compliance

Ask: Do you have a written site safety plan and a named site supervisor?

Red flag: No safety plan, unsecured trenches, or no fall protection on multi-story work.

Want a second opinion on a quote you've already got?

AM Builders is a Calgary-area general contracting company built by a licensed realtor and an experienced builder — we know what a trustworthy quote looks like, and we're happy to help you sanity-check one.

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This guide is for general educational purposes and reflects common Alberta requirements as of 2026. It is not legal advice — always confirm current requirements with your municipality, WCB Alberta, and a lawyer before signing a construction contract.