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Growing Opportunities Await Skilled **Roofing**



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In this competitive job market, it is wise to periodically evaluate your skill set and know how to demonstrate your value to current or prospective employers. As a roofing professional, you've certainly built up a bank of practical knowledge through experience. If you've managed roof projects for a number of years, no doubt you learned a few things about human nature, materials, quality workmanship, and what makes a good roof. These skills are a solid foundation for a rewarding career as a roof quality assurance observer (RQAO).

Eric Droz is a Registered Roof Observer (RRO) with the Conley Group in Irving, Texas. He summed up the opportunity this way: "Working in the trades, eventually you reach your peak hourly wage, and you can't progress any further. If you want to advance, you need to look at other options. If you are willing to challenge yourself, evaluate what you know, and learn what you need to know, you can become a quality assurance observer."

Observe and Report

Roof quality assurance observers monitor materials installation throughout the course of a roofing project and regularly submit reports to the design team. An RQAO is the design team's on-site witness to ensure compliance with design details, warranty terms, standards, and conditions. The observer's vigilance includes comparison of production rates against milestone tasks and deadlines. His/her reports will commonly include written notes, photography, measurements, and material samples.

According to ASTM Standard D7186-05, "Quality assurance observation of roofing projects is an important process for determining if the removal, installation, repair, or maintenance of roofing materials or systems follow the scope and intent of the contract documents and are installed and executed in accordance with accepted roofing practices and the contract documents."

RQAOs have full authority to observe all construction materials, equipment, and supplies for quality and for compliance with the contract documents and to inform the owner's representative of work that does not conform.

The demand for RQAOs is growing. Building owners, school districts, corporations, and government agencies are coming to understand the value of quality assurance for roofing installations. Tighter budgets and a societal shift towards sustainability have increased the emphasis on value engineering in an effort to make roofs and other capital goods last longer. Having an objective set of eyes to oversee the materials installation makes for a better-performing finished product, which should be a common

Quality Assurance Observers

by William Myers

goal for all contracted parties.

Building envelope consultant Arthur “Chip” Ward, III, RRC, principal of A.P. Ward Consulting in Kennesaw, Ga., noted, “Owners and design professionals know that they have a better chance of getting a quality roof if an observer is present on the job. Observers give assurance that the roof system is installed properly — per plans and specs. That influences the cost of the

installation by averting hidden expenses from improper application.”

From Contractor to Observer

Steven Hutmacher, RRO, CDT, performs roof quality assurance work as project superintendent with Weatherproofing Technologies Inc. in Beachwood, Ohio. He began his career as a commercial roofing

contractor in 1983. After many years, problems with his back caused him to ponder alternate, less physically demanding career options. When an opening arose to work with a prominent roof consulting firm in 1996, he seized the opportunity.

While contracting can be physically demanding work, quality assurance observation is demanding in other ways. “When I was a contractor, I’d be physically exhausted at the end of a long work day,” he said. “As an RQAO, you have tiring days, but on those days, you’re more mentally tired than physically tired.”

Experience as a roofer is often beneficial when doing quality assurance. Hutmacher said, “It’s helpful when you’ve been personally responsible for installing a roof. You understand and can foresee some of the challenges the installing crew may face, and it helps you to relate with the different parties and can make you a better communicator of what is happening.”

Ward agreed, noting, “Former contracting professionals mostly just need to learn the consulting side of the business — how we operate and perform our duties as third-party consultants.”

RCI (formerly known as the Roof Consultants Institute) is a professional association of building envelope consultants and a leading proponent of roof quality assurance. According to a 2012 survey of consulting firm principals, three out of four consulting companies employ professionals whose primary function is quality assurance for roofing installations. The firm leaders noted increasing workloads and growing demand for quality assurance monitoring. Contracting firms and materials manufacturers also appear to be increasing their use of RQAOs.

Roof quality assurance observation is showing itself to be a growing field with well-paying jobs. A poll of RCI members revealed, on average, skilled roof quality assurance observers earn annually from \$40,000 to \$50,000, and that a large number of successful RQAO professionals have transitioned from careers as roofers.

Many RQAO-trained professionals progress to perform additional duties, including inspections and maintenance and project management services. Common salaries for RQAO professionals with expanded skills can range from \$50,000 to \$80,000 annually.

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As the practice of RQAO continues to grow, so too does the importance of clarifying the skills necessary for the successful practitioner, both as a guide for the aspiring professional and for the employer to be assured of a scope of competency. The Registered Roof Observer (RRO)® designation was established in 1992 with those goals in mind. While administered by RCI, the program is open to all applicants; membership with the association is not

required. For many consultants, contracting firms, and building managers, the RRO designation is the preferred standard for RQAO professionals.

"After being laid off recently, I decided to learn what was needed to earn the RRO title," said Droz. "I buckled down and used my available time to study. I had a job two weeks after I passed the exam. The RRO definitely opened doors for me. With it, you

get instant credibility."

"You know that an RRO has the knowledge to perform roof observations at a professional level," agreed Ward. Consulting firms commonly offer RRO-trained observers additional salary — on average, \$5,000 annually.

Becoming a Registered Roof Observer

The first step for aspirants of the RRO designation is to apply and be approved to take the RRO exam. Applicants must have a minimum of two years of experience as a roofer, roof foreman, roof superintendent, or quality assurance inspector. Four years as a roofing manufacturer's representative will also suffice. Twelve hours of educational credits at relevant seminars and professional references are also requirements.

"Taking RCI's two-day Rooftop Quality Assurance educational program is a smart step for those interested in the RRO designation," said RCI Associate Director Micki Kamszik. "Connecting with the association members can also be helpful, as they can lend support to those preparing to take the exam." Additional information about the Registered Roof Observer program can be found at www.rci-online.org/professional-programs.html.

Hutmacher credits the RRO designation as a defining asset for the practicing RQAO. "I've seen firsthand how having the RRO puts your application at the top of the list. It helps employers, and ultimately the customer, to know you have established experience, knowledge, and a commitment to your career through [continuing] education," he said.

Defense Department Backs Use of RROs

The United States Department of Defense (DOD) recently declared its preference for quality assurance observation on all roofing and reroofing projects. The DOD is one of America's largest property owners; its purview encompasses all branches of the armed forces. The Army alone has over 330 million square feet of roofs on 90 military bases in the continental United States. The seeds of this policy began in 2005 when the U.S. Army Reserves formalized a program for life-cycle roof management called the

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National Roofing Initiative (NRI). The NRI was based on the premise that consistent design, quality materials, and expert application (quality assurance) could extend service life and reduce roof maintenance and repair costs over time.

Registered Roof Observers receive specific mention within the DOD's Unified Facilities Criteria (UFC). Paragraph E-1 in the appendix on Quality Assurance Considerations states, "Quality control requirements must be clearly defined and enforced. The cost and benefits of roof installation observation by a Registered Roof Consultant (RRC) or a Registered Roof Observer (RRO) or a registered PE or RA that derives his or her principal income from roofing design should be considered for all Military roofing projects."

Though only recently adopted officially, the guidelines of the program have been in place for some time. Lt. Col. Olan "Bud" Lewis, US Army (Retired), was an instrumental player in getting this policy in place. He noted, "I know of 14-year-old roofs that have had basically no expenses for maintenance or repairs. We've had virtually no leaks on 8 million square feet of roofing. And if there is a repair issue, the warranties are valid and cover the expense — thanks to design quality and installation oversight."

The NRI program is a boon for qualified design professionals and exemplifies the demand for RQAOs. Lewis commented, "The Army Reserves currently has need of between 40 to 50 RROs a year for new construction and reroofing projects. The Reserves have one-tenth of the total square footage of the Armed Forces. So as this program becomes fully implemented throughout the military, there is the potential demand for approximately 400 to 500 RROs. Just the other day, I had a call from a consultant in need of an RRO."

A Promising Future

As societal attitudes move towards fiscal prudence, and building owners demand more sustainable roofs, the value of the RQAO will continue to grow. Trained professionals whose objective vigilance can ensure better-quality, longer-lasting construction are certain to find well-paying employment opportunities. If you are an experienced roofing professional, with an eye for detail, roofing quality assur-

ance observation is a career path worth considering. 

William Myers is Director of Marketing Communications for RCI, Inc., an international association of building envelope consultants whose members specialize in design, investigation, repair, and management of roofing, exterior wall, and waterproofing systems. For more information, visit: www.rci-online.org.

Pick Up More Information Online

For more information on becoming an RQAO, check out the online version of this article at www.RoofingContractor.com.



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