



**WhistlerIrrigation**  
Services, LTD.

# Consumers Guide

## How to Choose An Irrigation Contractor.

This educational service is provided by Paul Hauschka, owner of Whistler Irrigation Services Ltd.

I've been in the irrigation contracting business for over twenty five years. In that time, I've observed that the selection of an irrigation contractor can be the subject of much consumer confusion.

In fact, there are many misconceptions about irrigation contractors. I decided to offer our consumers guide so that when **you** select an irrigation contractor, an informed intelligent decision can be made, resulting in choosing an experienced professional who will provide reliable efficient solutions.

You deserve the best service and value for your money. Do not accept less. Following are:-

### **The 4 Most Common Misconceptions**

### **The 10 Must Know Tips**

Financial decisions have an element of risk associated with them and you need a way to properly judge a potential contractor, his product offering, and mitigate that risk. Price is seldom a reliable indicator, particularly when your knowledge of the potential finished product is elementary and uncertain. How do **you** know what to look for? Who can you trust? Here are some common misconceptions.

**Misconception # 1:** We are IIABC Certified.

Certified in what? The Irrigation Industry Association of B.C. encourages education streams [See Link to IIABC Certification Program](#) and certifies individuals and companies in a variety of disciplines. These range, for individuals, from a CT level 1, a simple basic introduction to irrigation practices, to the very demanding Certified Designer designation. For companies, the gold standard is to qualify as a Certified Irrigation Contractor Turf Commercial (of which there are only 9 in B.C.). Big difference, and you can see how a general statement can be quite misleading.

**You** can easily check and compare the status of your candidates at [See Link To IIABC Certified Professionals](#)

**Misconception # 2:** An electrical ticket is not needed for work on irrigation low voltage valve or sensor wiring, or controller power supplies.

The B.C. Safety Authority conducts an exam to verify, when successfully passed, the competence of any person who performs work as described above. Requirements to qualify to take such exam include an approved 24 to 30 hour Electrical Code Book Course and 1800 hours or one year of suitable work experience under a Certified Field Safety Representative, Class LO, Low Energy Systems. The FSR must in turn be, or be employed by, a Licensed Electrical Contractor who has posted a performance bond with the Safety Authority. A permit is required for each project. The Safety Authority conducts public education and enforcement programs due to the hazard potential of inadequate work.

Why would **you** unnecessarily and knowingly assume any risk.

**Misconception # 3:** The Contractor with the lowest price will be the best choice.

We all know intuitively that this is false and the brain surgery analogy comes to mind. The thought is attractive however, and something for nothing drives much marketing.

How can **you** determine, in advance, if a proposal :-

- matches precipitation rates of sprinklers operating at the same time.
- is suitably cost effective, vandal resistant, and durable equipment is used.
- considers sun angles and microclimates.
- is designed to be hydraulically sound and will operate properly with no water hammer.
- has the controller outside for service access and weatherproof.
- uses installation practices leading to costly future maintenance issues.
- will provide full coverage in following years when plants grow.
- stipulates what is included and are they licensed for such work such as the main water connection, or assessment, installation and testing of the required backflow device.
- provides for an adequate and reliable service and product warranty commitment.

An IIABC Certified Designer's technical skill and integrity is recognized by granting them a "Seal" which they are entitled to affix to designs and accompanying specifications which meet IIABC [Standards For Landscape Irrigation Systems](#). Rather than you investigating and guessing at technical matters for which, at best, you can only probably apply your own common sense, why not ask for the proposal to be "Sealed" by the contractor's designer or someone from the web site list [See Link to IIABC Professionals](#) if there's nobody suitable on his own staff.

The entire purpose of IIABC certifications is to protect the public from shoddy work and unscrupulous contractors. It is only sensible for **you** to take advantage of such resources.

**Misconception # 4** : All irrigation service providers are pretty much the same.

What's the big deal. Fix what's broken. As with most things, you get what you pay for. I'll tell you how my company services our clients and let you be the judge.

In the spring, we provide all customers with a written quote for the season's service. Our mission is to provide our clients with a complete no hassle no worries experience by taking care of absolutely everything. Each property is assigned to a service technician who provides the owner with a direct cell phone number for any questions or concerns they may have. We arrange our own access to turn the water supply on in the spring, test the system, and make any necessary repairs. We manage and maintain the system all summer long, altering the controller watering duration as the weather dictates. We make contact with any landscapers so that their activities or concerns are always considered. The controller is checked regularly as other maintenance activity, power surges, and even minor electrical storms easily trip ground fault breakers. Zone areas are tested if stress, washouts or any other evidence suggests something is wrong. We also, on our own, with no reminders needed, conduct the required test and report on the backflow device, shut the system down when appropriate, and blow the water out for winter.

In short, we take complete responsibility for the irrigation system as if it was our own. This level of service is reliable and remarkably inexpensive as with 1200 customers in Whistler, each service technician has a small geographic area in which he is always located, doing similar things for all his customers.

Not all service is the same.

Call me personally if you are not being treated as **you** deserve to be. (604-698-1700)

## **The 10 Must-Know Tips for choosing an Irrigation Contractor**

### **1. Are they an Irrigation Industry Certified Contractor?**

This is the most important and easiest qualification to check. Becoming a Certified Irrigation Contractor is no easy feat and a pretty good indication that the recipients are knowledgeable and credible. Check out the IIABC website before you consider hiring anyone [Link to Certified Irrigation Contractor](#)

This program was designed to protect the consumer from unqualified contractors and provides a quick and easy screening process. Many companies advertise that they are IIABC Certified and it's possible they are certified in something (see misconception # 1), but they are not Certified Contractors unless they are listed in the above website.

Don't even think about hiring an uncertified contractor. Why would **you** take a chance?

### **2. Does each service technician carry a complete inventory?**

There is nothing more wasteful than a contractor arriving on site to repair your system without the correct parts. Check to ensure they have the necessary inventory for your specific system and do not substitute. Do not risk compromising the integrity of your system with substandard or incorrect parts.

### **3. Do they have an adequate number of qualified service technicians?**

When it comes to irrigation, qualifications and experience count. A skilled technician can quickly and efficiently diagnose a variety of problems, and will spend less time on site saving you money. Make sure your contractor has a sufficient number of skilled technicians so their service is available immediately when you needed it. You can efficiently point out what's wrong and not be left with trying to explain remotely, well after the fact.

### **4. Is the company a Rain Bird Select Contractor?**

Rain Bird Select Contractors are an exclusive group, chosen for their demonstrated commitment to the industry's highest standards of quality and integrity. These contractors are at the top of the industry and with this relationship, are the only ones able to reliably deliver on an extended 3 or 5 year Rain Bird product warranty.

**5. Does each service technician carry a computerized customer database?**

A computerized database, complete with detailed system descriptions and sketches is an invaluable asset to ensure time spent on site is as efficient as possible. It takes significant skill and commitment to accumulate all the data of a particular property. However, much time and money can be saved using this extra resource during system diagnostics. Ever searched for a soil or mulch covered valve box without knowing where it should be?

**6. Does the company have a proven track record?**

Is the company well known in the community? What's the word of mouth from previous customers? Are they and each of their staff members suitably licensed and insured? Will they still be in business 3 years from now to stand behind the warranty of their work? Certainly they are nice people and have to start somewhere, but does the evidence suggest you will be part of their learning experience.

Why should **you** take the risk?

**7. Is the company staff aware of and certified to test your backflow equipment?**

Properly operating backflow devices are essential to protecting the potable water supply from contamination. A Cross Connection Control Active Tester certification, together with officially calibrated instruments, are required to conduct performance tests.

Compliance with Provincial safety regulations and the mandatory annual test and report to the RMOW must be certified. Consider your potential liability if this is neglected.

**8. Are they a licensed bonded electrical contractor with ticketed technicians**

Refer to misconception # 2 for an outline of the requirements in this area. Think of the consequences of a problem with unpermitted or unauthorized work. If a contractor is not so qualified, you should have him get an electrical contractor to supervise that aspect of the work and guide the permit process.

What is the benefit to **you** for taking such a risk.

**9. Does the contractor have the financial ability to warranty their work**

It is essential to ensure your contractor can stand behind his work financially. Otherwise any warranty or guarantee is just an empty promise. In a catastrophic event like a flood,

frozen system or failed water connection, a company that does not have significant assets and appropriate insurance is just another liability.

**10. Are they a local company?**

Many companies advertise and work in Whistler but are the owners as well as suitably skilled staff resident here? Prompt maintenance attention, as well as an immediate response in an emergency, is only possible if the contractor is local with service personnel in the community.

If you have reached this point in my “GUIDE” I hope you now have the resources and information you need to make an informed decision for your needs, whether new installation or service for an existing system.

I'll be happy to answer any further questions and / or provide you with a free consultation or written project or service proposal, without obligation of any kind. I will also be happy, if you are not in the Whistler area, to provide advice and to supplement or explain information on the IIABC web site. To reach me call 604-698-1700. Thank you and please visit our website at [www.whistlerirrigation.com](http://www.whistlerirrigation.com) if you have not already done so.

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