

Change Orders

THE RULE

No direction, no work. Changed work starts only when there's written direction, and every change gets documented the day it's found.

This is the rule the book is named after, and it comes straight out of our field change order procedure. Field change orders exist so we don't do free work and the scope doesn't creep. They give us a clean record for owner approval and billing, they protect the schedule, and they cut down on disputes. The superintendent is usually the first one to see a change, so getting paid starts in the field.

What Counts as a Change

Owner requests to add, remove or upgrade something. Plan or spec conflicts that need a different solution. Unforeseen conditions like hidden utilities or bad soils. RFI answers and architect's supplemental instructions (ASIs) that change the work. If it's one of those, it's a change, and it gets handled like one.

The Superintendent's Part

- 1 Spot the change early and document it right then with photos, video and notes in the daily log.
- 2 Notify the PM in writing. An email or a text counts.
- 3 Get written approval before you proceed. Owner decisions go through the PM and get confirmed in writing.
- 4 Stop and call if the change materially affects scope or schedule, or if safety or damage to the work is at stake.

For documentation, I want before and after photos from the same angle, a markup or sketch with dimensions, and the date, time, location and who asked for the change.

COMMON MISTAKE

Doing the Work Before the PM Knows About It. This is the most common way changed work turns into free work. Don't rely on a verbal OK. Document it, tell the PM, and wait for written direction unless safety or damage to the work is at stake.

From Change Event to Change Order

- 1 Log the change event and tie it to its backup, whether that is the RFI, the plan change or the email.
- 2 Find everybody it affects. Adding two roof drains is a plumbing change, but it also touches the roofer and maybe the carpenter. Price all of them now instead of finding out later.
- 3 Send a request for quote with a clear description, the correct revision of the RFI or drawing, and a short, realistic due date. Three business days is typical for us.
- 4 Review the sub's quote. Check labor rates against the contract, material costs against the market, productivity and quantities, equipment, and anything counted twice.
- 5 Issue the sub change order and the owner change order with the markup your contract allows.
- 6 Execute and record it. Save the signed change order and its backup as one file, and update the status log with the new contract amount.
- 7 Verify in the field that the changed work matches the approved direction, and update the as-builts.

Time and Material Tickets

When work goes T&M, the sub documents labor hours, equipment, materials and notes every day, and the superintendent signs the ticket before the end of that same day. Subs have to notify you before they perform extra work, and you verify quantities and pricing before you approve anything.



Underground conduit in the trench before it gets covered. If it is changed work, photograph it now.

What Backup Looks Like

We send every sub a written directive that spells out the backup we need on a change order. It doesn't change the subcontract. It clarifies what the subcontract already requires.

- No lump sums without backup. Show how you got each number. A total by itself is not backup.
- Convert "days" into defined labor and equipment hours.
- Labor is a burdened rate built up from base wage, payroll taxes, workers compensation and benefits or overhead, times hours.
- Equipment is a rate built from ownership or rental, fuel, maintenance and insurance, times hours. Include rental invoices.
- Materials are quantity times unit price, with the basis (field measurement, plan revision or RFI).
- When productivity drives the cost, state the production rate you assumed.
- Change orders without compliant backup don't get approved or sent to the owner, and we don't recognize schedule impacts without an approved change order.

Markup is whatever the contract says. One of our subcontracts, for example, capped profit and overhead on sub change orders at 10%. Your number comes from your contracts.

An AI assistant can help check a sub's change order for missing backup or double counting. Check every finding yourself before you respond (Chapter 13).