

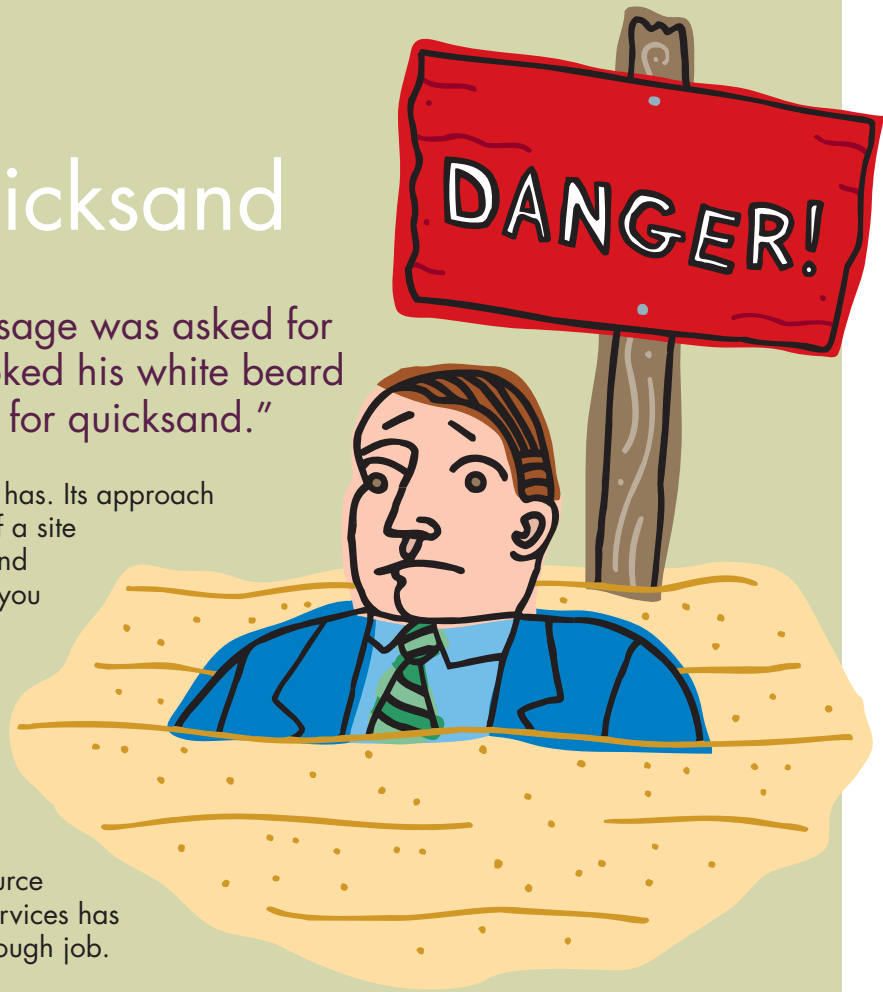
Site Selection: Beware of Quicksand

When an elderly engineering sage was asked for advice on site selection he stroked his white beard and remarked, "Always check for quicksand."

Although he didn't elaborate, SSOE Group has. Its approach to site selection uncovers all the attributes of a site that can swallow up time on the schedule and money in the budget if not detected before you buy. In fact, SSOE promises to save clients time, trouble, and money by finding the best site for their needs.

A Job for Pros

It's critical to be able to recognize "quicksand" in all its forms and know how to deal with it. Sad but true, not every resource that raises up a hand to offer site selection services has the knowledge and skill to do a smart, thorough job. Like the firm responsible for this snafu...



The company, an international automaker who was opening a plant in the US, had a site, a plan, and a project deadline. Their first site glitch was the discovery, during construction, of a creek that had to be rerouted. The next "oopsy" was when the bulldozers encountered a rock bed that had to be blasted out of the way. The final blow was finding that its site was home to an endangered species.

This was not a case of bad luck. These were three costly oversights that could have been avoided. A top-notch site selection firm would have conducted the appropriate studies to identify any and every body of water. It would have tested the soil not only for rock, but also for other characteristics and would have investigated if Bambi's endangered friends hung out on the property.

Who Should You Trust?

As a long list of unfortunates who sunk too much money into site preparation would be eager to point out, "commercial real estate company" is not synonymous with "qualified site selection firm." Let's talk about some key differences between the two. Real estate brokers make money on commission. They are likely to be biased to one site over another for reasons that have nothing to do with the client's needs. The best ones may offer basic information about zoning, access to utilities, and possibly permits. That leaves a lot of sinkholes they simply don't look for.





SSOE follows a detailed checklist of attributes in determining the suitability of a site. These include environmental considerations, access to transportation, access to utilities, soil conditions, amount of cut and fill required, air quality, various codes, and permit (federal, state, and local) requirements. They have either in-house staff or consultants who are experts on these topics. The only bias SSOE has is towards its client's best interests.

Seeing the Big Picture

Compare these checklist items to running a battery of medical tests. If you want to interpret the results correctly, you have to know a lot about the patient. In the same way, you have to thoroughly understand what the company is going to do with the site in order to evaluate it fairly. That's why SSOE starts the site selection process by studying the client's business

and what they have planned for this chunk of land—down to the details. That puts them in a position to determine the “must haves” and “nice-to-haves” of a site.

Transportation is a good example. SSOE met with a client who had purchased a site in a hilly region in the northeastern US for its new production facility. SSOE pointed out that hilly terrain and rugged winter weather was a bad combination for a company whose “must haves” included reliable truck access.

It's obvious that whoever selected this site forgot that it needed to support the function of the facility. Tunnel vision is the enemy of site selection where the macro level (does the site need to be near an airport?) is equally important as the micro (will the two-lane road be wide enough?).

Fitting the Pieces Together

It's second nature for SSOE to have a practical, utilitarian viewpoint when evaluating a site. As an EPCM firm, SSOE is all about providing services related to designing and building facilities. So the engineers are always thinking about how to best integrate the process with the facility and how that impacts the site. Things like the degree of slope and soil conditions jump out at them. Poor soil might mean piling is required – an expensive solution. And too much slope...

Here's a unique case that happened to another global manufacturer: The company bought a parcel that ultimately required moving more than 25 million cubic yards of earth to level the site – an off-the-charts challenge that negatively impacted the schedule and budget.

There is a lot of a client's time, trouble, and money at stake in site selection. SSOE's thorough and knowledgeable approach turns that risk into reward for its clients with a level of service that more than pays for itself.

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Checklist of site attributes

Environmental Issues

- Air quality
- Endangered species
- Creeks / Streams
- Hazardous materials
- Wetlands

Access to Transportation

- Air
- Rail
- Roads

Access to Utilities

- Electricity
- Gas
- Other fuels
- Water / Sewer

Applicable Codes

- Permits
 - Federal
 - State
 - Local

Site Slope / Topography

Soil Conditions / Water Table