



Inspector General Insights

Background: On September 28, 2022, Hurricane Ian made landfall in Southwest Florida as a major category 4 storm, ranking among the most powerful storms to ever hit the United States. Due to a combination of high winds and a substantial storm surge, there was an urgent need for electrical repair services to address the aftermath of the disaster. Therefore, Collier County sought services from two electrical vendors for electrical repairs, and for disaster recovery for traffic signals and roadway lighting. The OIG reviewed invoices for the electrical repairs only provided by Simmonds Electrical of Naples, Inc.

Objective: The objectives of this review consisted of the following:

1. Determine if the billing is in compliance with contract 18-7311 “Electrical Contractors”, and contract 19-7527 “Electrical Contractors with Public Utilities”.
2. Determine if the amounts paid would be considered compliant and reasonable with a subsequent FEMA audit.

Scope: The scope of the above-mentioned objectives consisted of the review of some invoices under Purchase Order (PO) 4500219990 and PO 4500220275 for services provided post-Hurricane Ian.

Observations: During the invoice review process, the following observation was made:

Both contract 18-7311 “Electrical Contractors” and contract 19-7527 “Electrical Contractors with Public Utilities” segregate electrician helpers (\$17 per hour) and apprentice electricians (\$65 per hour) to be charged at different rates, but the contract did not provide a standard to differentiate the two.

Upon review, we identified two young employees, aged 20 and 22, that were categorized as apprentice electricians. Given their young age, we requested additional information to show the two employees qualified as apprentice electricians, but the electrical repair vendor did not provide any such evidence. While some companies require electrical experience, not all do. It appears that potentially anyone can be hired and charged as an apprentice without a standard set of rules. Therefore, the OIG was not able to substantiate whether the two employees qualified to be paid at the higher rate. The invoices were paid as billed.

Recommendations & Actions: Contract 18-7311 “Electrical Contractors” has expired, and contract 23-8074 “Electrical Contractors” has taken its place. An outline of the different labor positions between contract 19-7527 and contract 23-8074 follows.

Both contracts contain different labor positions, with a large disparity between the Apprentice Electrician and Electrician Helper. Therefore, the OIG recommends the County incorporate clear and enforceable criteria within the contracts to distinguish between these two positions.

Contract 19-7527 "Electrical Contractors with Public Utilities"

Journeyman Electrician \$65 per hour

Apprentice Electrician \$65 per hour

Electrician Helper \$17 per hour

General Laborer \$14 per hour

Contract 23-8074 "Electrical Contractors"

Journeyman Electrician \$70 per hour

Apprentice Electrician \$70 per hour

Helper \$18 per hour

General Laborer \$15 per hour

Furthermore, it appears that both the Electrician Helper and the General Laborer positions have either been underutilized or have not been utilized at all in billing through these contracts. The County should consider reassessing the labor positions outlined in the contracts.

Management response:

It is not common practice to provide specific definitions of roles such as electrician helpers and apprentice electricians within the solicitation or contract language. Typically, these roles and their qualifications are governed by industry standards or licensing requirements, which can vary by jurisdiction or company. The distinction between these categories is often based on job function, experience level, or certifications, rather than a standardized contract definition.

In the specific case raised, where two employees were classified as apprentice electricians, we acknowledge the concern about the vendor not providing sufficient documentation to support this classification. While age alone is not a definitive qualification, we understand the importance of ensuring that individuals categorized as apprentices meet the necessary criteria to justify their rates. Since no specific contractual standard was in place and the vendor did not provide the requested documentation, the invoices were processed as billed.

Regarding the procurement process, the requesting divisions are responsible for obtaining quotes and determining their reasonableness relative to the scope of work. The selection and application of specific contracts are determined by the requesting divisions based on their operational needs. Procurement's role is to ensure compliance with established procedures.

For the labor positions outlined in contracts #19-7527 and #23-8074, we recognize the disparity between the rates for Apprentice Electricians and Electrician Helpers. It is worth noting, that both solicitations went through a competitive process within a span of approximately four years. While it is not unusual for labor categories to differ between contracts, we agree that clear and enforceable criteria would help avoid ambiguity in classification. It is also worth noting that Contract #19-7527, "Electrical Contractors with Public Utilities," was solicited specifically for services with Public Utilities.

Procurement's recommendation is to amend the existing contract #23-8074 to include specific definitions for personnel positions. Should the vendors decline to amend, an alternative course of action would be to resolicit the contract with minimum requirements for each position clearly defined.

Conclusion: The vendor continues to service the County under both contracts.

- Contract 19-7527 “Electrical Contractors with Public Utilities” is in effect until September 9, 2024.
- Contract 23-8074 “Electrical Contractors” went into effect on July 11, 2023. The agreement term is for three years with two additional one-year periods.

Total # Transactions	Amounts Audited or Reviewed	Questioned Costs	Taxpayer Savings	# Observations / Recommendations
10	\$74,371.35	\$16,867.50	N/A	1