

Project Description

The Powell Courthouse, located in downtown Richmond, is one of only two major buildings surviving the fire that occurred during the evacuation of the Confederate army out of the city in 1865. It is the oldest courthouse building that the GSA manages.

A new Federal Courthouse on Broad Street was completed in 2008. Many of the people and functions of the old courthouse were moved to this new facility. Once this new facility was completed, the GSA began exploring options for what to do with the additional space in the old courthouse. Many structural, mechanical and electrical changes would be required in order to upgrade this property and make it available for future tenants. The significant historical nature of this structure and the number of changes and additions to this building over the last 158 years required considerable care and attention to details during the renovation.

A general contractor from Greensboro, NC was selected to begin phase 1 of at least 3 phases of work on the courthouse. The work would involve not only the third floor of the Main courthouse building but the Annex complex as well. As is the case with many older structures, there were

known environmental issues such as lead paint and asbestos. The GSA needed a qualified, reliable and experienced contractor to determine the proper way of removing hazards such as these from this historical building. Waco has a long history of successfully completing similar projects in other government and privately owned buildings, and was selected through a competitive bid process to perform the work under a contract with J. Wayne Poole, Inc.

One of the key challenges involved removing many layers of lead paint from the plaster ceilings. The ceilings were 20 to 25 feet above the floor and scaffolding and special lifts were required in order to reach the work area. Waco determined that the plaster ceiling would need to be completely removed because the ceiling was very unstable and would not support the hangers for a drop ceiling or any HVAC equipment that would be installed. Poly sheeting encased each room which was put under negative air pressure so that all lead contaminants were contained within the work area. Additional padding and floor protection was installed in each room and hallway to reduce any noise transmission to other floors while the work was in progress.

The lead paint in the window trim was especially thick. A peel-away chemical stripping technique was employed in order to preserve the specialty woodwork design of each window. This involved many steps and applications to completely remove the hazard. Asbestos was also found in the window glazing and on the seams sealing the ductwork, and had to be removed. In addition, asbestos was found on much of the piping that was being replaced, which added to the overall abatement contract.

Asbestos in the mast coat of the old flooring was discovered in two places under floor tile and under a thick layer of cement leveling compound. Waco developed a system which involved using 20 inch grinders with diamond tipped blades in conjunction with a constant misting spray of water. The system allowed Waco to remove the thick cement layer without creating a major dust hazard. It would also require constant attention by Waco supervision during the entire process, to ensure that there was no water damage to the building.

The main occupants in the building during the renovation were the 4th Circuit Court and the U.S. Marshals Service. All workers had to fulfill a complete background clearance before coming on site. Maintaining a professional work crew and keeping accurate records was of extreme importance. The first two phases were completed on time. There was minimal disruption to the occupants and the GSA has successfully leased the renovated space. We look forward to working on phase three when the GSA obtains final funding approval.

