

## Site Photography

By Eric Pempus, AIA

### § 3.6.2 EVALUATIONS OF THE WORK

§ 3.6.2. The Architect shall visit the site ... to *become generally familiar with the progress and quality of the portion of the Work* [italics added] completed, and to determine, in general, if the Work observed is being performed in a manner indicating that the Work, when fully completed, will be in accordance with the Contract Documents. — AIA B101 Standard Form of Agreement Between Owner and Architect

As they become “generally familiar with the progress and quality of the Work,” architects customarily, although not required under the standard agreement, use photography (either photos or videos) to document work on the site. You can use this photography to satisfy the contractual requirement to “keep the Owner reasonably informed about the progress and quality of the Work.” The ever-evolving technology of photography is irrelevant to this discussion. We will instead talk about what to photograph and what photographic format to use.

**What to Photograph:** Appropriate subjects for site photography fall into three categories: (1) deviations from the Contract Documents, (2) specific areas where significant construction progress has been made since the previous visit, and (3) the overall progress of the construction. Each category has its own guidelines.

- (1) Deviations: You should document deviations, including defective work, with photographs, from as many angles as to make the nature of the deviation clear. Stand close to the defective work so the defects can be readily seen in the photos. If showing scale is important, include in the photo either a scale with visible markings in inches or an object with a commonly known size (say, a pen).
- (2) Areas Showing Progress: On a typical site visit, you will spend most of your time observing work that has been performed since your previous visit. These areas should be photographed to graphically support your field report descriptions of the work. Frame your photos so only the new work is included.
- (3) Overall Progress: Indiscriminately snapping numerous shots of the site on each visit may not be the best practice. You’ll end up with a lot of photos you will never need, either for your field reports or for your office. However, once these unseen photographs are filed they could be used against you if a dispute arises. For example, if one of these photos shows a defect that you hadn’t identified in your field report. The owner and contractor could claim that you were negligent in not identifying the defect, since you had obviously seen it.

Don’t include the faces of construction workers or others in your photos unless it’s unavoidable. If the photos are used for any reason other than your field report, you may consider blurring people’s faces. If you see a condition that you believe is unsafe, don’t photograph it. Instead, report the condition immediately to the contractor’s superintendent

**Photographic Formats.** All you need for site photography is a smart phone or a small pocket camera; you're an architect, not a professional photographer. These tools can give you still and video records, as well as a flash when needed. Time-lapse photography of the site over a long period of time is usually outside the architect's scope.

**In Conclusion.** Each photo should be short for a specific purpose, usually to visually support your field report narratives. When used with your professional judgment, photographs can be an effective tool in documenting the construction progress and in helping you produce effective field reports.

***Disclaimer:** The viewpoints expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and are not necessarily approved by, reflective of or edited by other individual, group, or institution. This article is an expression by the author(s) to generate discussion and interest in this topic.*

---

***About the Author***

***Eric O. Pempus, FAIA, Esq., NCARB, LEED GA** has been a risk manager for the last 12 years with expertise in architecture, law and professional liability insurance, and a unique and well-rounded background in the construction industry. He has 25 years of experience in the practice of architecture, and as an adjunct professor teaching professional practice courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels for the last 30 years. As a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects and a member of the AIA National Ethics Council, he has demonstrated his impact on architectural profession. He has presented numerous loss prevention and continuing educational programs to design professionals and architectural students in various venues across the United States and Canada.*