

► INDUSTRY WHITEPAPER

The State of Estimating in Demolition & Abatement

Why Growing Demand, a Retiring Workforce, and a New Generation of AI Are Reshaping How This Work Gets Bid

2026

A BID DUE FRIDAY

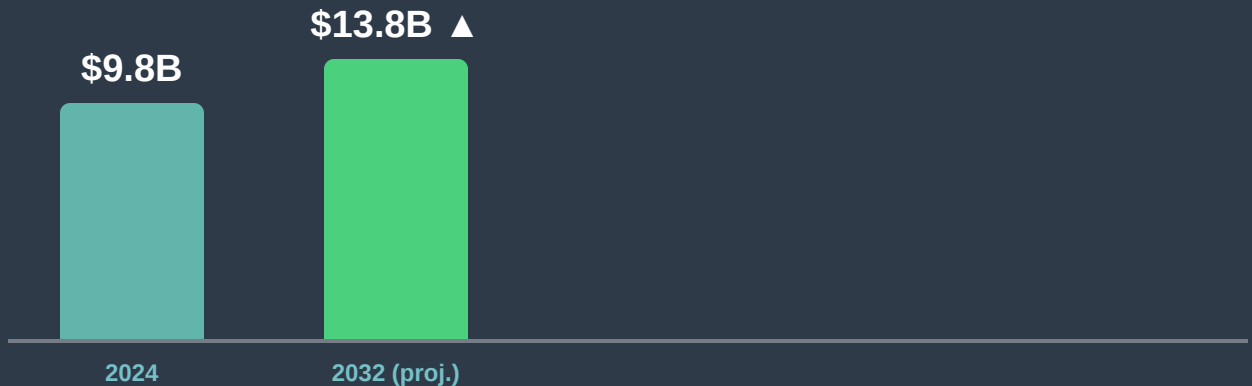
This trade grew up on paper, on judgment, and on institutional memory that tends to walk out the door the day a senior estimator retires.

Picture a demolition estimator on a Wednesday afternoon with three bids due by Friday. One monitor has a forty-page asbestos survey open. Another has a stack of drawings whose floor numbering doesn't quite match the survey's. A third has the spreadsheet that's tracked every job this company has won for a decade, built years ago by someone who retired last spring and never fully documented how it works.

This paper looks at what's starting to change that: a market that keeps growing, a workforce aging out faster than it's being replaced, and a new generation of AI finally built for how this work actually gets scoped. It ends with a look at FieldFlō's Takeoff & Estimating, the only platform built specifically for demolition and abatement.

There's more of this work coming, not less. Aging buildings need to come down, contaminated sites need to get cleared, and environmental enforcement keeps expanding what counts as a job for a licensed abatement crew rather than a general demolition crew.

U.S. DEMOLITION MARKET, IN BILLIONS



Source: P&S Intelligence, 2025 [1] · asbestos abatement growing even faster on a percentage basis, Precedence Research, 2026 [2]

More work is good news for firms that can bid it well. But it also means more bids going out the door, faster, from the same small group of people who actually know how to price this work correctly. Growth doesn't shrink the workload sitting on the estimating desk. It multiplies it.

The stakes of getting a bid wrong are higher here than on most construction jobs, too. In 2024, OSHA fined a demolition subcontractor \$392,000 for a list of violations that included demolishing an eight-story building without disclosing an asbestos survey the company had known about for years [3].

A missed line item in this trade isn't only a margin problem. It can turn into a citation, a stop-work order, or worse.

Every estimating department has one person everyone goes to when a bid doesn't look right. They've been doing this for twenty or thirty years. They know that a tight-access room slows a crew down, that a certain material always runs high on waste, that one disposal facility charges more for wet debris than another. None of that is written down anywhere. It lives in their head, and in a spreadsheet only they fully understand.

16,900

cost estimator job openings projected per year through 2034 — driven almost entirely by retirements, not growth.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2024–34 projections [\[4\]](#)

That person is retiring, and the industry isn't replacing them fast enough.

When that estimator walks out the door, the company doesn't just lose a hire. It loses the only complete record of how it has historically won work.

Ask a demolition or abatement estimator what actually takes the longest on a bid, and it's rarely the pricing. It's getting from a stack of documents, a survey, drawings, and a scope of work, to a single number they trust.

Here's roughly how it goes today. An estimator opens the drawings in a PDF markup tool and measures a room: 4,187 square feet of floor tile. Then they flip to the survey to check whether that tile tested positive for asbestos. Then they check the scope of work to see which removal method applies. Then they type all of it, by hand, into a spreadsheet that has no idea where any of those numbers came from.

That last step is where things start to slip. A measurement crosses from a tool that knows what it measured into a spreadsheet that only knows a number. The reasoning behind it (why wet removal instead of dry, what the site photos showed, how the crew arrived at a production rate for a tight space) doesn't make the trip. It has to be reconstructed from memory, on every bid.

Multiply that by every homogeneous area on every floor of every building a company bids, and it's easy to see where the week goes.

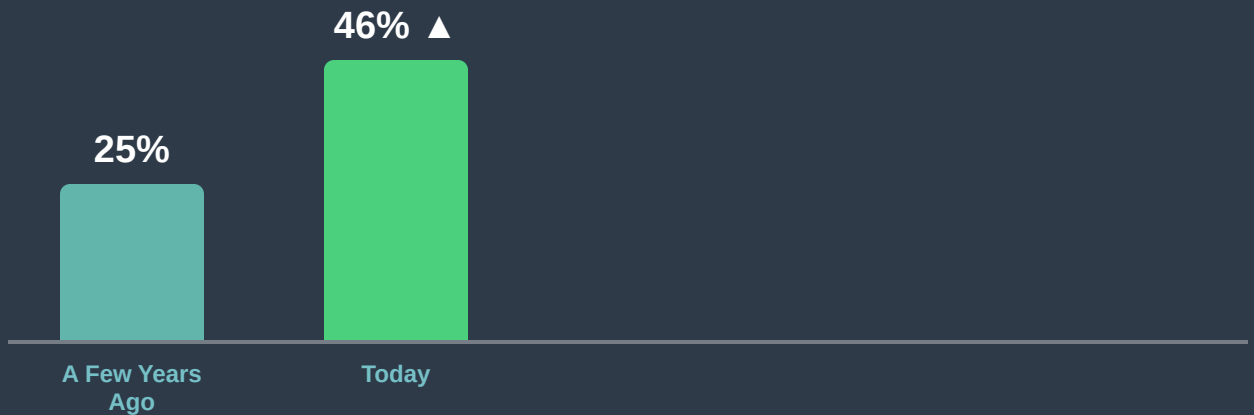
This isn't unique to demolition and abatement, but it's more expensive here than almost anywhere else in construction. Poor project data and miscommunication have been estimated to cost the U.S. construction industry over \$31 billion a year in rework [5].

4. The Site Visit No Spreadsheet Accounts For. On any job over roughly \$50,000, someone experienced walks the building before the bid goes out: ceiling heights, freight elevator access, loading dock space, power and water for containment. None of that shows up in a takeoff — it shows up as a padding factor no one's written down anywhere.

➤ 5. Why AI's Moment in Construction Has Arrived

Construction has lagged nearly every other industry on productivity for decades. McKinsey found construction labor productivity grew about 1% a year over two decades, versus roughly 3.6% for manufacturing — a gap that, closed, could add well over a trillion dollars in value to the global economy every year [6]. That gap is exactly why AI is showing up in construction now.

SHARE OF CONSTRUCTION FIRMS USING AI OR ML TOOLS



Source: Deloitte Access Economics for Autodesk, 2026 [7]

AI is now the single largest category where contractors say they plan to increase technology spending [8], and one academic study found AI-assisted takeoff cut measurement time by roughly half while improving accuracy over fully manual methods [9].

6. FIELDFLÖ'S TAKEOFF & ESTIMATING

The only platform built specifically for demolition and abatement.

Most estimating software was built for general contractors first, and adapted for specialty trades second, if at all. FieldFlö built its Takeoff & Estimating module the other way around, starting from the survey — reading the documents estimators already work from and turning every measurement into a scope item that keeps its source: what the material is, which document it came from, what method applies, and what it costs.

It captures the scope logic that currently lives in one experienced estimator's head as reusable, organizational knowledge instead of something that leaves when someone retires.

ABOUT FIELDFLÖ

FieldFlö is a field service and project management platform purpose-built for the demolition, abatement, and remediation industry, used by contractors to run estimating, scheduling, compliance, and field operations in one system. Learn more at fieldflo.com.

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