

FREE GUIDE

Getting paid on Alberta jobs

The dates that decide when you get paid, in plain words.

Who this is for

If you do work on Alberta jobs and wait too long to get paid, this is for you. Alberta has a law that says how fast you must be paid. It's called the Prompt Payment and Construction Lien Act, and it has been in effect since August 29, 2022.

You don't need to read the law. You need to know the dates.

The dates at a glance

31 days

Longest you should go between invoices

14 days

Owner's deadline to dispute your invoice

28 days

Owner's deadline to pay what isn't disputed

7 days

GC's deadline to pay subs after getting paid

60 days

To register a lien after your last work (90 for concrete)

The payment clock

The owner has 28 days to pay a proper invoice. The clock only starts when the invoice is right, so a sloppy invoice can cost you weeks.

- 1. Bill at least every 31 days.** The general contractor (GC) must send the owner a proper invoice at least once a month, unless the contract says otherwise.
- 2. Owner has 14 days to dispute.** If the owner doesn't agree with the invoice, they must send a written notice of dispute within 14 days.
- 3. Owner pays in 28 days.** Anything not disputed must be paid within 28 days of the owner getting the invoice.
- 4. GC pays subs in 7 days.** Once the GC is paid, it has 7 days to pay its subcontractors for their share.
- 5. Same for the next level down.** A sub that gets paid has 7 days to pay its own subs.

If the GC isn't paid by the owner, it must tell its subs in writing. If it doesn't send that notice, it can still owe the subs in full.

What makes an invoice "proper": your name and address, the date, the contract, what work was done, the amount, and who to pay. Check your contract for anything else it asks for. Missing pieces give the owner a reason to reject it.

Holdback: getting your 10% back

Holdback is 10% of each invoice that the owner keeps until the job is done. It's your money. It's just parked until it's safe to pay out.

It gets released when two things are true:

- **The work is signed off on paper.** Finishing the work isn't enough. The clock starts when the job is inspected and approved, usually with a certificate of substantial performance.
- **The lien period has run out with no liens on the job.** That's 60 days for most work, or 90 days for concrete work and oil and gas wells or sites.

On big jobs (over \$10 million and longer than a year), the owner must release holdback in stages, at least once a year, instead of all at the end.

Get signed off fast. Every week you wait for an inspection or a signature is another week before the holdback clock even starts. As soon as the work is done, ask for the inspection, fix any deficiencies quickly, and ask in writing for the certificate.

Where holdback gets lost: nobody pushes for sign-off, nobody tracks the 60 days, and nobody sends the invoice for the holdback. Put the sign-off date on your calendar the day you get it.

Liens: your safety net has a deadline

A lien is a claim against the property you worked on. It's your strongest tool when someone won't pay, but it expires fast.

- You have **60 days** from your last day of work or delivery to register a lien.
- It's **90 days** for concrete work and for oil and gas wells or sites. Ready-mix suppliers don't get the extra time.
- Miss the date and the lien is gone for good.

Public jobs, like government work, follow different rules. Check before you count on a lien there.

Faster than court: if an invoice is disputed, you can send it to adjudication. An adjudicator decides the dispute in weeks, not years, and for far less than a lawyer and a trial.

Checklist for every job

- ☐ Read how and when the contract says to invoice
- ☐ Send a proper invoice at least every 31 days
- ☐ Write down the date the other side got each invoice
- ☐ Mark day 14 (dispute deadline) and day 28 (payment due) on your calendar
- ☐ If you're a sub, mark 7 days after the GC gets paid
- ☐ Write down your last day of work or delivery
- ☐ Mark day 60 (or 90 for concrete) for your lien deadline
- ☐ Book the inspection and ask in writing for sign-off as soon as the work is done
- ☐ Fix deficiencies quickly so sign-off isn't held up
- ☐ Invoice your holdback as soon as the lien period ends with no liens

Fine print

This is a plain summary, not legal advice. Your contract can add its own steps, and the law has details this guide skips. For a dispute or a lien, talk to a construction lawyer. For more detail, see the Alberta Construction Association's [plain language guide to the Act](#).

Cobalt Project Controls helps Alberta contractors track invoices, changes and holdback. cobaltpc.ca · cobaltpc.ca@gmail.com
· 587-599-6835. Plain summary, not legal advice. October 2026.