


The Smart Shopper's Guide to Comparing Shipping Container Building Bids

When you're shopping for a shipping container building, not all builders — or bids — are created equal. It's easy to compare based on price alone, but that can be a costly mistake if you're not asking the right questions.


Here's a comprehensive guide to ensure you're comparing **apples to apples**, and not getting shortchanged on quality, safety, or performance.

1. Will the Building Be Permitted?

 **Why it matters:** Getting a building permitted adds cost and time — but it also ensures it's legal, safe, and built to code. Some builders skip this step to keep prices low, but it could cost you big later.


- **Ask:** Is this bid for a *permitted* or *non-permitted* building?
- **Red Flag:** If one builder's price is way lower, they may not be including permitting or inspections.

2. What Type of Insulation Is Being Used?

 **Why it matters:** Insulation affects comfort, energy efficiency, and HVAC performance. Cheap insulation can lead to moisture problems, mold, and premature equipment failure.


- **Ask:** What type of insulation are you using? What's the R-value?
- **Look For:** Double barrier insulation (like R-6), which prevents moisture buildup between container walls and fiberglass insulation.

3. HVAC System Type

 **Why it matters:** Some builders use inexpensive window HVAC units that are loud, inefficient, and short-lived.


- **Ask:** Are you installing a window unit or a mini split system?
- **Pro Tip:** A quality mini split system can last 10–20 years and be much more efficient and quiet.

4. Interior Wall & Ceiling Materials

 **Why it matters:** Budget builders may use paneling or thin wall board instead of real drywall with texture and paint.


- **Ask:** What interior materials are included? Is it painted, finished drywall?

5. Doors and Windows

 **Why it matters:** Exterior doors need to withstand weather. Some builders cut corners with interior doors used outside — not safe or durable.

- **Ask:** Are the exterior doors industrial-grade? Are windows energy-efficient?

6. Builder Credentials

 **Why it matters:** Licensed and certified builders follow strict safety, labor, and construction standards.


- **Ask:** Are you a state-certified builder? Do you carry general liability and workers' comp insurance? Do you follow a quality control manual?

7. Warranty Coverage

 **Why it matters:** A solid warranty protects your investment.


- **Ask:** What warranty do you offer on workmanship and individual components?

8. Experience & Project Complexity

 **Why it matters:** Simple builds are one thing, but for complex projects, you need a builder who can solve problems quickly and has seen it all before.


- **Ask:** How many similar projects have you completed? Can you share photos, references, or arrange a site visit?

9. Scope of Work – What’s Included?

 **Why it matters:** One bid might include everything; another might leave out appliances, finishes, or engineering.


- **Ask:**
 - Does the bid include HVAC, appliances, cabinetry, and finishes?
 - Are design or engineering services included?
 - Does this include Title 24 or energy code compliance?
 - Are city/county fees and permits included?

10. Foundation and Finishes

 **Why it matters:** A complete bid should account for the foundation, tile work, waterproofing, and vapor barriers.


- **Ask:**
 - What kind of foundation system is included?
 - Is tile installation included for floors and showers?
 - What waterproofing standard is used?

11. Timeline & Communication

 **Why it matters:** Understanding who’s managing the project and what delays might arise keeps your build on track.

- **Ask:**
 - What’s the projected timeline, and what could cause delays?
 - Who will manage the project day-to-day?

12. Payment Schedule & Change Orders

 **Why it matters:** You should know exactly when and how much you’ll pay — and what happens if you want to make changes.

- **Ask:**
 - What are your payment terms?
 - How do you handle change orders?

Final Tip: Compare Apples to Apples

Before you make a decision, line up every bid and compare each feature side-by-side. What seems like a “deal” might be missing crucial elements — or cut corners that will cost you more down the road.