

Red Flag Comparison Table

Comparison Table for evaluating fiberglass pool bids. It shows exactly what low-ball bids often cut, the risk, and what a standard bid should include.

The bitterness of poor quality remains long after the sweetness of low price is forgotten.
Benjamin Franklin

Item / Step	Low-Ball Bid Shortcut / Red Flag	Risk / Consequence	Standard / Professional Practice
Base Material	Sand, clay, or native soil	Pool settling, warped shell, cracked deck	4–6 inches of clean crushed stone, compacted and laser-leveled. Soil conditions may require more.
Base Leveling	Eyeballing / no laser	Crooked waterline, uneven shell stress	Laser leveling, screeding, multiple checks before shell placement
Backfill Material	Excavated dirt or clay	Uneven pressure, wall bulging, drainage issues	Clean crushed stone or pea gravel, backfilled in layers
Water/Backfill Sequence	Backfill first, then fill water	Shell flexing, cracking, step/bench damage	Fill water incrementally while backfilling in layers
Drainage / Groundwater	No French drain, no hydrostatic relief	Pool lifting, structural stress, deck movement	French drain, sump pit, perimeter drainpipe, hydrostatic relief valve to address groundwater
Plumbing / Equipment	Flexible hose, untested pipes, cheap pumps, no licensed plumber	Leaks, costly repairs, equipment failure	Schedule 40 rigid PVC, pressure test lines, quality pump/filter equipment; licensed plumber on staff
Shell Ordering / Deposit	Large upfront deposit without clear explanation	Delays, non-delivery, lost deposit	Deposit tied to manufacturer order confirmation; reasonable % of total cost, typically below 30%
Warranty	Manufacturer shell only; no warranty on installation	No recourse for installation defects	Installation/workmanship warranty (1-2 years) in addition to shell warranty
Installer Capabilities	Few installs; no service dept; no parts warehouse	High risk of installation; no after build support	Installer with 15+ fiberglass pools per year; 5 years of experience. Service department and Warehouse.
Site Inspection / References	Cannot show recent pools	Cannot judge long-term quality	Visit 2–4 completed pools, 2–4 years old, check waterline, deck, coping and condition of shell
Excavation & Step Support	Minimal compaction under steps/ledges	Steps flex, gelcoat cracks	Hand-pack gravel or structural foam under steps/benches
Timeline / Project Management	Vague start/finish; no sequence	Delays, hidden costs, corner-cutting	Clear day-by-day installation sequence including shell set, water fill, backfill, plumbing, deck

90 – 100 Excellent

75 – 89 Moderate Risk

50 – 74 Risky

Fiberglass Pool Installer Scorecard

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Category	Points (0–10)	Scoring Guide	Contractor 1	Contractor 2	Contractor 3
Base Material	10	10 = clean crushed stone 4–6” compacted; 0 = sand or dirt			
Base Leveling	10	10 = laser level + screed; 0 = eyeball only			
Backfill Material	10	10 = clean stone/pea gravel; 0 = dirt/clay			
Water/Backfill Sequence	10	10 = fill water while backfilling; 0 = backfill first, then fill			
Drainage / Groundwater	10	10 = French drain + hydrostatic relief; 0 = ignored			
Plumbing & Equipment	10	10 = Schedule 40 PVC + pressure test + quality pumps; 0 = flex hose / untested			
Upfront Deposit	10	10 = deposit tied to shell/equipment purchase; 0 = large upfront without proof			
Step / Bench Support	10	10 = properly packed gravel / foam; 0 = minimal / voids			
Warranty	5	5 = 2-year workmanship + shell warranty; 0 = shell only / no workmanship			
Pool Installer Capabilities	5	5 = 15+ pools per year + 5 years + plumber on staff; 0 = 5 pools per year + 2 years; no licensed plumber; no warehouse			
References / Previous Pools	5	5 = can visit 2-3 pools, 2–5 years old; 0 = cannot show			
Project Management	5	5 = clear day-by-day plan; 0 = vague / no sequence			

Total Score: 100 points

90 – 100 Excellent

75 – 89 Moderate Risk

50 – 74 Risky