A Limited Scope of Work...

Question: When spray fireproofing subcontractors bid very low on a project, is it because they limit their scope of work?

Answer: Yes — very often, an unusually low spray-fireproofing bid is low because the subcontractor has limited their scope of work. But that's *only* one of several documented reasons low bids happen. The search results show that low bids across construction are frequently driven by missing scope, unclear scope, strategic underbidding, or misunderstanding the scope — all of which directly apply to fireproofing.

1. Low bids are frequently caused by missing or unclear scope
Industry data shows that low bids often come from subs who did not include the full scope or interpreted it differently than competitors.

- A Procore survey found ***45% of subcontractors on low-bid projects faced issues with missing or unclear scope details***
- Bid-leveling research shows that large bid spreads are usually caused by scope assumptions, exclusions, and interpretation differences, not true price differences.
- ISG reports that ***the lowest bid is often 22% lower than the next bidder because of scope gaps, not efficiency***

In fireproofing, this typically means the low bidder excluded:

- patching
- priming
- access issues
- deck edges
- beams above ceilings
- UL alternates
- cleanup and protection
- off-hours work
- density testing
- bond strength testing
- mobilization costs
- containment or masking

These exclusions make the number look artificially low.

2. Underbidding is often caused by incomplete understanding of the scope
EstimateHawk identifies incomplete scope understanding as a top cause of underbidding — subs miss alternates, conditions, or spec requirements.
For fireproofing, this often means:

- They priced only the drawings, not the specs
- They missed UL design requirements
- They assumed standard thicknesses
- They didn't account for access or sequencing

This produces a low number — but not a realistic one.

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3. Some subs strategically underbid and plan to recover through change orders (COs)
EstimateHawk explicitly identifies strategic underbidding as a common tactic: subs bid low to win, then rely on change orders to make money later.

Fireproofing is especially vulnerable to this because:
- scope gaps are easy to exploit
- inspections create leverage
- patching and access issues generate COs
- GCs often must proceed with the sub already mobilized

This is why low fireproofing bids often explode into COs.

4. Market pressure and desperation can push subs to cut scope
When work is slow, subs lower margins or cut scope to stay busy. EstimateHawk notes that desperation for work is a major driver of low bids, even if the job becomes unprofitable later.

In fireproofing, this often means:
- pricing labor unrealistically low
- excluding prep, protection, or testing
- ignoring schedule impacts
- hoping to renegotiate later

5. Low bids often hide risk — not value
Industry data shows low bids frequently lead to:
- more change orders
- schedule delays
- budget overruns
- rework

For example:
- 57% of low-bid projects exceed their budgets and 46% miss deadlines
- Rework from poor planning can add 20–30% to project cost

Fireproofing is one of the trades where rework is most expensive because failed inspections stop the job.

The Bottom Line
Yes — limiting scope is one of the primary reasons spray fireproofing subcontractors bid very low. But it's not the only reason.
Low bids *also* come from:
- missing scope
- misinterpreting scope
- strategic underbidding
- desperation for work
- unclear drawings/specs
- market pressure

In almost every case, the low number is low because something is missing — not because the sub is more efficient.

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