



Back to Work: Construction Industry Best Practices to Flatten the Curve

“Stay Home, Stay Safe” Rightly Implemented

The members of the Associated Builders and Contractors of Michigan pride themselves on placing safety above all other things when it comes to the job site and employees. That is why we were initially supportive of Governor Whitmer’s “Stay Home, Stay Safe” Executive Order 20-21, as this unknown virus presented far too many questions for us to operate “business as usual.” Our volunteer leaders and members knew the Governor was receiving the best information at the time and was focused on flattening the curve, limiting operations to those only deemed essential. We made the decision to support Governor Whitmer, along with the Speaker of the House, the Senate Majority Leader, and industry leaders across the state.

Construction Best Practices Successfully Established

As this crisis has developed, construction industry leaders took immediate action, pursuing necessary changes and upgrades for all safety protocols, as construction job sites were deemed essential and part of our critical infrastructure in many states across the country. The Construction Industry Safety Coalition (CISC), comprised of over 25 construction industry trade associations, set out to create a template plan for contractors to tailor to their respective state’s directives that would provide proper guidance, in order for work to continue.¹ Utilizing the most current information provided by the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) on the COVID-19 virus, the template provides a comprehensive layout for businesses regarding exposure prevention, preparedness, and response.

Manager/Supervisor Responsibility. A brief overview of the document highlights how everyone must play their part in ensuring that company safety procedures are adhered to. However, leading by example is where it must begin and end. That is why managers and supervisors are required to be familiar with the plan and serve as proper examples of how it must be followed.

Employee Responsibility. Control and preventative guidance regarding sanitation, proper distance, and identifying the symptoms of COVID-19 are provided to the employee relating to their interaction on the job site. It also clearly identifies a main contact who employees are encouraged to contact should they need questions answered or concerns addressed. Establishing this point of contact creates a strong line of communication, reaffirms proper oversight, and reduces the chance of misinformation.

Job Site Protective Measures. Policies must be established that conform all normal operations to the new reality of working in an environment where COVID-19 exists. That includes safety meetings done by phone, avoiding physical contact with colleagues when possible, staggered breaks and lunches, and reducing significantly, if not eliminating, the use of tools by multiple workers. It is also encouraged to limit the need for N95 respirator use, putting proper controls in like water delivery and dust collection systems. Additional measures include reducing the number of job site visitors, while properly screening those who are deemed “necessary” to be on site, and wearing proper gloves and eye protection at all times.

¹ <http://www.buildingsafely.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CISC-COVID-19-Exposure-Prevention-Preparedness-and-Response-Plan-4839-3808-6584-1.docx>



Job Site Cleaning and Disinfecting Measures. The company should also establish regular disinfecting procedures, including frequently wiping down tools and equipment with alcohol wipes and identifying someone who will be changing the trash regularly in a particular area while wearing nitrile, latex, or vinyl gloves. Similar procedures should be put in place for portable toilets, vehicles, break rooms, and trailers. The company should maintain Safety Data Sheets detailing the disinfectants used on site.

Jobsite Exposure Protocol. Should an employee exhibit symptoms of COVID-19, they must remain home until they are symptom free for 72 hours, without the use of symptom-altering medicines. When practical, employees returning to work should have a doctor's note. If an employee tests positive, they must self-quarantine and can only return when directed by their medical care provider and possess proper documentation indicating such. If it is learned that other employees have come into contact with someone who has tested positive, they will be required to self-quarantine for 14 days from the last date of close contact.

OSHA Recordkeeping. The plan should have procedures in place that for reviewing whether a confirmed case of COVID-19 meets the criteria for recording and reporting under OSHA's recordkeeping rule. Any updated guidance or explanation from OSHA should be adhered to that advise employers on how to determine if a COVID-19 case is considered work-related.

Confidentiality and Privacy. The plan also establishes necessary confidentiality and privacy standards when it comes to an individual's medical records. A company should minimize the number of persons informed of a particular individual's health status as to only those necessary in order to reduce the risk of transmission. Company's should do what they can to avoid personally disclosing the identity of an individual who contracted the virus, as long as it does not detract from implementing proper exposure-reducing best practices.

Sample Documents. The template also includes four sample documents for employers and employees. They include: 1) A sample letter used to designate a worker essential, 2) A sample letter used to notify an employee that they have come into contact with someone who tested positive and describes proper steps that must be taken, 3) A checklist for employers and employees on proper procedures for distancing, sanitizing, and reporting on the job site, and 4) A sample COVID-19 "Tool Box Talk," providing all necessary information described in the plan to employees.

Safe, Responsible Contractors Ready to Work

As builders, contractors, and others in the industry have implemented this template across the country, it has been demonstrated that construction work can be performed effectively and safely, while maintaining social distancing and industry standards. Construction employers are doing what is required to keep their workers safe, working, and part of the solution to get this economy, our state, and our country back on track.

To be clear, this is not business as usual. Safety measures that have proven to be effective in the fight against COVID-19 must continue to remain in place as we continue to flatten the curve. Any employer or company that fails to implement proper protocol should be held accountable. In these unprecedented times, we look to those who act responsibly, professionally, and safely. The employers and workers in the construction industry that adhere to this template provide prime examples of how it can be done.