



Construction returns post COVID-19 shutdown: 5 key steps to do it safe and smart - by Matt Caruso & Frank Marino

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As we prepare for the pause to be lifted, the key questions many of us are looking to answer include:

How do we adapt to the new normal while remaining effective in our day-to-day activities?
How do we safely balance the health and productivity of our employees in the workplace?
What are the best practices that I can put in place to mitigate potential health hazards?

We have spent the last few weeks seeking answers to these questions. There is no simple answer or magic solution. Everyone must continue to follow the guidelines set forth by the CDC and New York State Department of Health. We have outlined five key steps, education, monitoring, distancing, sanitization and personal protection, to answering the questions above, as we see it.

Education

It's essential to educate workers on their personal responsibilities to maintaining a healthy workplace environment. We suggest that prior to starting the work day, all workers should receive a jobsite orientation, which includes the new COVID-19 procedures, and protocol as outlined by the CDC, state guidelines and any specific safeguards pertinent to their workplace environment. They should be cognizant of both what to do if they suddenly feel ill at work and who to contact in your organization.

Furthermore, each workplace should have a dedicated individual responsible for the communication of healthy workplace practices. They should be responsible for the organization and tracking of orientations to ensure all individuals returning to work are educated on new protocols. We also encourage weekly safety meetings in which site safety can cover any items that are not being followed correctly. This is also a time where employees can voice any concerns they may have. After all—Everyone wants to stay healthy and sometimes a gentle reminder is all that is needed!

Monitoring

Workers who are not feeling well or exhibit any symptoms of COVID-19 should be prohibited from entering the workplace. These workers must be quarantined away from the workplace immediately and remain symptom-free for a minimum of 14 days before they can return to the workplace. We recommend the employer receive medical clearance from each sick employee before returning to the workplace. If a worker becomes sick while onsite, they should be sent home and the same procedure should take place before they return. We encourage work sites to implement additional precautionary efforts to assist in maintaining a healthy environment.

In order to mitigate health risks and exposure on your site, we recommend adding an on-site medical professional who holds an emergency medical technician license. The onsite medic can be used to assess the health status of each worker through direct screening questions and taking temperatures using infrared no-touch thermometers. They can also assist in educating your workforce on health guidelines and monitor site compliance. The medics are well versed in handling emergencies using basic life support equipment and techniques.

Distancing

Social distancing remains to be the most important factor in getting people back to work safely. Employees are encouraged to remain six feet apart during work and off hours. Avoiding any areas where space is limited, such as elevators, restrooms and small areas is advised. We recommend employers hang signs reminding workers that social distancing protocol is being enforced. Employees should be encouraged to bring their own food to avoid going out during working hours. No equipment or supplies should be shared amongst workers. If necessary, workers must thoroughly sanitize items that are being used by multiple parties. On a major building project in NYC, it is imperative that shifts are staggered in order to avoid high traffic situations. We encourage construction managers to break down schedules in which all trades are not working at one time.

Sanitization

Offices and work areas should be thoroughly sanitized each day and throughout the day. There should be an emphasis on deep cleaning on any areas with high traffic of employees. Workers must wash their hands thoroughly and often.

Personal Protection Equipment

As an employer, providing personal protective equipment (PPE) to your workforce is crucial! Distribute whatever you can, including hand sanitizer, face coverings, nitrile gloves and cleaning products for workers'. Face coverings and gloves should be worn at all times throughout the day, especially when taking public transportation. Employees should avoid all physical contact including handshaking and large meetings. Site safety personnel should alert construction management teams immediately when proper PPE measures are not being followed. This is imperative in keeping the risk for any worksite spread of illness.

Returning to work safely is an effort that will need to be made amongst both employers and their employees. Cooperation and coordination from all staff is essential to keeping worksites safe for all. We urge employers to keep open lines of communication with their workers and listen to all

comments and suggestions on how to keep worksites safe.

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