



Construction can lead the way in a safe economic reopening - by Rich Cavallaro

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The construction industry has always been a key driver of the economy and now as New York begins its phased economic reopening after being paused by the novel Coronavirus pandemic, construction will be a leader in New York's revitalization. Under governor Cuomo's "New York Forward Plan," construction sites will be among the first workplaces to reopen in New York, playing an essential role in getting tens of thousands of New Yorkers back to work.

Being at the forefront of New York's reopening efforts brings added responsibility. Construction management firms must take proactive steps to instill confidence among workers, subcontractors, clients and government partners that we will keep our sites safe and implement best practices for preventing the spread of COVID-19.

The state of New York recently issued interim guidelines for reopening construction. These comprehensive guidelines and should be embraced by the industry as part of a smart, responsible reopening plan. This is the time for every construction project stakeholder – from the construction manager to the tradesperson – to do their part to uphold the guidelines in order to keep our industry safe.

At Gilbane, our commitment to safety has always been part of our DNA. It is what helped us build projects that have contributed to New York’s great history– from the 1964 World’s Fair complex in Queens to the “Miracle on Ice” Olympic Sports arena in Lake Placid. And now, it is our relentless focus on safety that will help us complete some of New York’s most impactful projects, including the new Northeast Bronx YMCA and the Mohawk Valley Regional Medical Center in Utica. Safety is at the heart of how we build, whether it means deploying new health protocols or technology that help our industry meet this unprecedented moment.

Construction management firms now have an opportunity to contribute to a strong and safe reopening for construction in New York. We need to make sure that we’re following the latest protocols and guidelines from local, state, and federal health authorities. And our industry leaders can take a proactive approach by maintaining focus on three core areas: site-specific safety plans, education and communication, and deploying new technology to address specific challenges.

Site-specific safety plans

We have adapted our longstanding, site-specific approach to safety planning by bringing that process in line to address new concerns created by COVID-19. New York state is requiring that every project site have plans to reduce density, maintain physical distancing, and promote good hygiene. From staggering start times to outlining one-way stairwells and providing access to more handwashing stations throughout the site to creating a thorough cleaning plan, these protocols are an important part of instilling a sense of confidence and trust in the construction industry workforce.

Education/communication

Raising awareness and promoting good hygiene has been a core tenet of stopping the spread. When it comes to implementing new plans, companies must go above and beyond to ensure that every employee – from the worksite to the corner office – are educated on all best practices and guidance from public health officials. Gilbane has put special emphasis on this by developing a daily health self-check questionnaire to help make sure no one comes to work if they are sick. Our project teams are hosting toolbox talks, stand-down meetings, and posting signage throughout our sites with critical hygiene information. All project stakeholders must be on board with the importance of adopting and upholding the COVID safety protocols and communicating that expectation will be critical to adherence to the new State guidelines.

Smart use of technology

Technology can play a powerful role in contributing to a safer project site. We’re using new

technology tools to help reinforce physical distancing, enable fast temperature checks of workers, and reduce the number of high touch surfaces that we need to interact with. Gilbane has partnered with Triax Technologies to deploy new devices that not only help to remind workers to maintain physical distance, but can also help with contact tracing in the event that a worker does contract the virus so that swift action can be taken to protect others on the job.

The new workplace environment and challenges created by COVID-19 may be complex, but for construction leaders in New York, our focus must remain simple: Planning, educating and innovating to ensure a responsible reopening. Gilbane is proud to continue working with industry leaders, clients, partners, public officials to do just that – and we know that while this difficult period for our state will not end overnight, we can emerge stronger and safer as an industry in the days ahead.

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