



## **As New York's construction sites reopen, industry leaders must continue innovating to address new challenges - by John Fish**

May 27, 2020 - Design / Build



After almost two months since governor Cuomo announced a construction moratorium, job sites across New York State are beginning to reopen, leading industry leaders to navigate how to manage the health of workers while adhering to new federal and state safety requirements.

New York has already provided new construction guidelines for employers and employees to return back to work that takes into account physical distancing, hygienic practices and protective equipment. And while the guidelines set forth by the state provide a foundation for how to resume construction, industry leaders must also have their own comprehensive and smart approach that includes the use of new technology to keep thousands of workers safe in a post-COVID-19 environment.

Just a few months ago, no one was thinking about body temperature scans or social distancing, but COVID-19 has underscored the need for new technology to address these issues now. And in an industry that has always been driven by a focus on the well-being of our employees and those we serve, applying our spirit of innovation to our safety efforts is just part of the job.

Suffolk has always been at the forefront of layering sophisticated new technologies with more traditional strategies to keep workers safe. The two main drivers behind our safety approach have been the wellbeing of our workers and the thoughtfulness of our jobsite reopening plans. We find that the industry's approach to safety must not be limited to checking items off of a list and instead incorporate the "human side" of safety through enhanced communication and engagement with workers. Listening to the concerns of workers, answering their questions and helping them feel more comfortable returning to work is essential as we begin to reopen our sites.

And while, construction leaders need to focus on educating their teams and effectively implementing all the protocols and other guidance from public health and state officials, we must go beyond just complying with new rules and regulations. We must pursue parallel tracks of strict regulatory compliance and proactive innovation that keep advancing new technology to help detect and prevent health risks before they can occur.

One of the key measures to reopening workplaces is actively conducting temperature checks. However, manually pinpointing which individuals have elevated body temperatures can be time-consuming, especially on sites with large crews.

To streamline this critical process, Suffolk has invested in thermal camera technology to protect its workers and trade partners while maximizing efficiency on jobsites. The Forward Looking InfraRed (FLIR) thermal camera scans for a fever by using infrared imaging to automatically detect elevated skin temperatures that may indicate a fever—a key symptom of COVID-19. Every site has an assigned COVID-19 ambassador responsible for the proper use of this technology.

Ensuring workers are complying with social distancing guidelines is another point of discussion among the industry and public health officials. Setting passive markers that designate six feet of distance is helpful, but not ultimately effective.

We found that utilizing Triax wearable devices, which are placed on the front of employees' hard hats to track proximity among workers on jobsites, is a superior method of enforcing social distancing measures. When individuals are less than six feet apart, the device audibly alerts them. This technology also facilitates contact tracing by capturing attendance in real-time, providing companies with information about who is or was present on specific jobsites should an employee contract the virus.

These are just two significant examples of the spirit of innovation that construction industry leaders must emulate to give our workers confidence that we are putting their health first every single day. As an industry, we must continue to try different innovative approaches to keep workers safe, and it

is critical that we are working together to develop and deploy new tools in conjunction with adhering to new safety protocols. Our industry can be a real asset to our partners in government as they focus on New York's economic recovery and getting millions of workers—including construction workers—safely back to work.

John Fish is the chairman and CEO at Suffolk, New York, N.Y.

New York Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540