

March 25, 2020

# Best Practices for Construction Site Safety During the COVID-19 Pandemic



**Richard Reizen**

## Construction

Now that Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker's Stay at Home Order deemed construction to be an essential service, and the City of Chicago has confirmed that construction can proceed as an essential infrastructure exception, construction is being undertaken in a new and unprecedented environment, with a whole new set of rules.

While Gould & Ratner has offered numerous updates on new safety and employment concerns, it is also crucial that owners and contractors implement a project safety plan that incorporates all possible safeguards to protect workers and others on the site.

Any safety plan has to consider the health and safety of the workforce, comply with government rules and advisory opinions, and maintain adequate flexibility to adapt to future changes and clarifications to any governmental issued order, including a future shutdown. Rules can change suddenly in this climate, and governmental shutdown orders can be issued with little time to secure the site. For example, Pitkin County in Colorado ordered the cessation of all construction and gave contractors one week to secure sites.

Chicago is fortunate to have many general contractors who have developed thoughtful and thorough plans. However, owners, general contractors and subcontractors should all be familiar with and have an understanding of all safety plans.

When implementing a plan, consider some of these best practices:

### General

- Increased monitoring of the site and employees, including but not limited to, performing temperature checks of your workforce, maintaining logs of tasks performed and increased safety documentation.
- A dedicated safety employee who can document safety or health issues on your site.
- Ensure all workforce follows [CDC guidelines](#) for a safe working environment.
- Prominently post notices relating to safety onsite relating to updated safety procedures and information relating to preventing the spread of the virus.
- Document all safety-related issues and circulate notices of issues to all parties (observing the required confidentiality rules).

### Minimize workforce interaction as much as possible

- Ensure workforce is practicing safe social distancing, and if you see someone not observing such practices, say something and enforce requirements.
- Consider staggering workforce, using video conferencing and implementing designated individual break periods so that there is less interaction among trades.
- Increase sanitation stations onsite to prevent unsanitary practices.

- Provide additional disinfecting supplies to your workforce.

#### **Project partner plans**

- Confirm that all project partners have a safety plan in place and are following it.
- Discuss integration with your plan and how conformance will be documented. All safety plans need to be integrated to work.
- Be knowledgeable of notice periods in the event there is an event of exposure.

#### **Develop a safety/response plan**

- If an individual onsite is exhibiting symptoms, send the individual home to self-quarantine or seek medical care as necessary.
- Again, be cognizant of notice requirements (acts, orders, or otherwise).
- Inform necessary project partners and identify individuals who may have had close contact with the sick employee including the tasks that were performed by the person.
- Advise workforce of possible exposure and, if necessary, possible self-quarantine measures to be taken.
- Suspend work in impacted area(s) and commence actions to ensure the impacted area is cleaned and disinfected.

As with all other aspects of construction during this pandemic, collaboration, patience and diligence are equally important. For additional information or questions about implementing COVID-19 safety plans, contact a member of [Gould & Ratner's Construction Practice](#).