



COVID-19

Preparedness and Protocols

AGC and Contractor Members Discuss Best Safety Practices By Keith Gribbins



The majority of America was closed in April. Orders to shelter in place or stay at home because of the COVID-19 pandemic trickled down from the federal to the state to the neighborhood level. In the workplace that meant if your job was not considered essential by some sort of state order, you were often being asked to work at home or take a leave of absence. Luckily for all of us, the construction sector was for the most part considered essential, and the brave men and women in those crews (although smaller and working slower) were still building and repairing our nation.

Of course, not all states considered construction essential in April, and even states that did were sometimes contending with localized restrictions that could stop or change ongoing construction work. As of press time in late April, Washington, Michigan, Pennsylvania, New York, Vermont and New Jersey did not consider construction work essential for a variety of reasons. Regardless of your location, everyone's business was being affected. One of the biggest voices in the industry, Associated General Contractors of America (AGC), shared member survey data throughout April that showed project owners were halting or canceling current or upcoming projects and that contractors were furloughing or terminating workers at a concerning rate because of it. Yet, the construction industry wasn't struggling as much as some industries, partly because safety has long been a cornerstone.

"I think one of the reasons that we were successful in getting the Department of Homeland Security and so many local officials to agree that construction should be able to continue is because construction has a history and a long proven track record of complying with complex safety rules," said Brian Turmail, vice president of public affairs and strategic initiatives at AGC. "While we've had projects where individuals have tested positive, unlike other businesses that have continued to operate, we haven't seen, knock on wood, that kind of jobsite-wide outbreak that you've seen for example in the meat packing plant in Sioux Falls, S.D. The anecdotal information tells us the safety procedures our members are putting into place are working."

That's the Good News

"The broader challenge is that demand for construction appears to be shrinking," said Turmail. "A lot of private sector projects that were viable projects seven weeks ago look increasingly less than viable. And you know most state and local budgets are going to be under considerable pressure moving forward. Fewer people are driving, and fewer people are spending money. Unemployment claims are enormous drains on state and local coffers, and we've seen a number of states announce pullbacks in their road construction projects and other construction projects."

The situation is changing rapidly — so rapidly that accurate data for April will be impossible for this print edi-

tion, but hopefully May will see more construction crews back on more jobsites. But, as many of our readers already know, the jobsite has changed. Safety has always been a critical element on the construction worksite, and with COVID-19, safety precautions are increasing. Workers are standing 6 ft apart when possible. Meetings are shrinking or going virtual. Cleaning has increased on equipment, jobsites and common areas and individual hygiene and health monitoring have become critical. Luckily, contractors are adept at modifying operations for new rules.

"We're not just talking about protecting workers. We're talking about protecting their family and their neighbors and their community. It's a huge responsibility which our members are living up to."

— Brian Turmail, vice president of public affairs and strategic initiatives at AGC

Starting a COVID-19 Response Plan

First off, let's all agree that this article does not contain your COVID-19 Response Plan. That's because every operation is different, and each business must create its individualized preparedness plan. This article is supposed to point you in the right direction, confirm steps you've already taken and help showcase how big national contractors and organizations are handling the situation. To help all of us out, Associated General Contractors of Minnesota has pulled together the best eight-page worksheet on COVID-19 recommended "best practices" for construction jobsites we've seen. Why is "best practices" in quotes?

"We wanted to be careful of assembling something that was viewed as sort of an industry standard because every company's sophistication is different — every project is different," explained Tim Worke, CEO of AGC of Minnesota. "So, we were very strongly focused on best practices versus here's the standard because a lot of firms are going to exceed a standard, and there are some that are just going to do enough to meet the standard."

AGC of Minnesota's breakdown of COVID-19 best practices for construction companies is housed in two places — its website at agcmn.org/safety/covid-19 and at workingsafe.agc.org — a national AGC website dedicated to helping workers stay safe with the pandemic looming. First off, the Minnesota AGC chapter encouraged contractors to develop a COVID-19 Response Team, COVID-19 Response Plan document (available on all worksites) and a renewed Safety Committee with a special focus on COVID-19.

That's how Choate Construction started. Founded in Atlanta, Choate Construction is one of the largest general contractors in the Southeast, it is employee-owned and it's an AGC member.



Visitor and employee screening: In addition to limiting outside visitors from all work locations, persons returning to a jobsite or office location and participants in essential meetings must be screened before being allowed at any work location.

“As with any successful safety initiative, it’s essential the communication flows both ways,” explained Chad Hart, corporate safety director at Choate. “First, we immediately developed a task force of individuals from all disciplines in the company to meet virtually every 48 hours to understand what was needed, discuss updates, what was and wasn’t working and plan accordingly. Out of these meetings, our preparedness plan developed.”

The basics of Choate’s COVID-19 preparedness plan are also housed at workingsafe.agc.org. The document is the perfect starter piece, breaking down prevention into five major steps, full of great graphics and simple text so you can actually tape it up on a wall as a constant reminder.

“Normally we prefer community-driven jobsite gatherings to deliver important messages, but we instead divided and conquered, ensuring our message could be well received on an individual level,” said Hart. “Posters, banners and other materials were created, including informative pictograms to avoid language barriers and communicate critical actions to prevent the virus’ spread.”

You can download it at workingsafe.agc.org, and here’s a quick summary of those basics.

1. Social distancing: workers stay 6 ft apart; meet outside if possible; avoid confined areas; no communal food; reconfigure meetings and eating areas with the 6-ft rule; encourage the use of social tools to meet; consider additional satellite eating areas outside of the work area onsite; and sit adjacent to each other rather than directly across.

2. Personal hygiene: wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water; avoid touching your face; frequently sanitize tools, machines and personal protective equipment (PPE); avoid sharing tools and PPE; and utilize alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol.

3. Enhanced jobsite cleaning: work areas and common touch areas need to be cleaned on a regular basis, several times a week. This includes things like door handles, light switches, microwaves, copy machines, stair handrails, restrooms, trailers and construction equipment handles and cabs. Also, increased hand-washing stations should be put on all worksites. Disinfect all portalets with a bug sprayer filled with bleach and disinfectant/degreaser.

4. Jobsite entry: Make your employees ultra-aware that they should not be entering the jobsite if they have a fever over 100.4 degrees, shortness of breath or a cough. Contractors can also administer temperature check operations on project sites.

5. Travel restrictions: Avoid unnecessary travel and utilize virtual meeting tools instead.

Digging Deeper into COVID-19 Preparedness

Those five steps are just the beginning for Choate. Each step in a COVID-19 plan can be broken down into an impressive list of practices and protocols on your specific jobsite. Let’s round back to AGC of Minnesota’s breakdown of

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Physical Meetings & Safety Awards

“We are holding smaller but more frequent safety meetings, which are held outside, while maintaining social distancing and CDC recommendations,” noted Chad Hart, corporate safety director at Choate. “We are using these meetings to drive home what is in our preparedness plan, while also focusing on how employees can take home these essential skills to their families. The last piece of the puzzle is recognizing positive achievements and top performers with our gratitude for doing their part in keeping us all safe. Choate’s OneLife safety identity — to protect your life and your legacy — is fully embodied during this time.”

Disinfecting Your Machines

By Caitlin Maddock-Bahr,
Social Media Manager with Caterpillar



Keep those cabs germ free.

One of the most important ways to stay safe on the job right now is through regularly disinfecting your machines. To properly disinfect these areas, you can use soap and water, 70 percent Isopropyl alcohol or non-bleach disinfecting wipes/spray. Make sure to disinfect these areas frequently. Avoid using products with bleach or solvent-based solutions if possible, and avoid using disinfectants stored at temperatures above 30°C/86°F. Special attention should be paid to key touchpoints, including:

- Joysticks
- Steering wheels
- Switches
- Displays (including touchscreens)
- Grab handles
- Armrests and seats
- Consoles
- Door handles

COVID-19 best practices for construction companies. With its permission, we have compiled only one section of its best practices, but there is so much more online (agcmn.org/safety/covid-19). Let's tackle personal cleanliness and hygiene. The chapter recommended employees clean their hands often with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 to 95 percent alcohol. It's also pushing these practices:

- Provide soap and water and alcohol-based hand rubs in the workplace. Ensure that adequate supplies are maintained. Place hand rubs in multiple locations or in conference rooms to encourage hand hygiene.
- Do not share tools or any multi-user devices and accessories such as iPads, laptops, radios and computer stations.
- Limit the exchange/sharing of paper documents by encouraging use of electronic communication whenever possible.
- Do not share personal protection equipment (PPE).
- Sanitize reusable PPE per manufacturer's recommendation prior to each use.
- Ensure used PPE is disposed of properly.
- Utilize disposable gloves where appropriate; instruct workers to wash hands after removing gloves. Disinfect reusable supplies and equipment.
- Identify specific locations and practices for daily trash such as paper, hand towels, food containers, etc. Instruct workers responsible for trash removal in proper PPE/hand washing practices.
- Provide routine environmental cleaning (doorknobs, keyboards, counters and other surfaces).
- Do not use a common water cooler. Provide individual water bottles or instruct workers to bring their own.
- Utilize shoe sanitation tubs (non-bleach sanitizer solution) prior to entering/leaving jobsite.
- Instruct workers to change work clothes prior to arriving home and to wash clothes in hot water with laundry sanitizer.
- Instruct workers leaving the jobsite because of illness to collect their personal possessions before exiting the worksite.



Reconfigure break spaces to allow social distancing of 6 ft and clean and disinfect break tables at the end of a break.

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- Utilize disposable hand towels and no-touch trash receptacles.
- Request additional/increased sanitation (disinfecting) of portable toilets.
- Avoid cleaning techniques, such as using pressurized air or water sprays that may result in the generation of bioaerosols.
- Clean surfaces of heavy equipment enclosed cabs including service/fleet vehicles, steering wheel, gear shift, instrument panels, etc.; use aerosol sanitizers inside closed cabs.
- Replace cabin air filters if you suspect they have been exposed or compromised by a sick employee.

“We are only as strong as our weakest member on the jobsite,” said Worke. “You can have the best of the best general contractor with the best protocols in place, and onto the jobsite comes a subcontractor or a supplier or a specialty contractor and they’re the weak link. They’re not doing what they need to do. They make a mistake. Now that industry-leading general contractor is shut down, or the project is in quarantine because there’s an infection on the job. That leads to a further unwinding where the public policymakers start to look at the industry and say, well, it’s apparent that they can’t work safely. That could lead to further endangerment of whether or not the industry can remain open. So, we’ve been very strong about the need to have everybody try to adopt these types of best practices.”

What Happens if Someone Gets Sick?

It is inevitable. We all get sick, and our family members will all get ill at some point, so what can contractors and jobsite staff do to control sick employee situations? Let’s say an employee or subcontractor gets sick but does not exhibit symptoms of COVID-19. That person should go on sick leave just like standard company policy. Now, let’s say a worker does exhibit symptoms of COVID-19. What should happen? Lexington, Ky.-based general contractor Marrillia Design and Construction has pulled together an impressive set of protocols for COVID-19 exposure housed at workingsafe.agc.org.

According to the Marrillia COVID-19 safety plan, an exposed worker should go home, inform their supervisor, seek medical care and get tested for COVID-19 if necessary. If that employee or subcontractor tests positive for COVID-19, that person should stay home, seek medical care, inform their supervisor, remain out of work for 14 days from the date of the last positive diagnosis and should not return to work until cleared by the company.

Also, if that employee or subcontractor tests positive, Marrillia then kicks in another set of protocols for COVID-19 exposure. The Marrillia president notifies the project owner, quarantines all employees whose workspace is within 6 ft of the sick employee, including those with prolonged close contact (more than 2 minutes) for 14 days. Marrillia will then clear and disinfect the workspace of its sick employee, per the company’s safety plan. Then, Marrillia will continue advancing the project.

Just reading a list like that, of course, puts everyone on edge. Stress and mental health on the job and at home are being tested like never before, so it’s also very important for contractors to consider the emotional wellbeing of employees. AGC has released a Culture of CARE tip sheet — Maintaining a Culture of CARE During COVID-19 — that will help contractors retain their cultures and values. Tips include an emphasis on reinforcing zero tolerance rules for harassment and maintaining a connection with employees despite physical separation.

“We haven’t experienced a pandemic of this scope or related economic shutdown of this scope in 100 years, so no one’s been through this,” said Turmail. “These are stressful times for a lot of folks. You know, their kids are at home, going to school on computers. They only visit restaurants. Their friends in other industries are out of work. It’s stressful. So firms should make sure they’re taking time to have one-on-one check-ins with their teams to make sure they know that they’re appreciated and most importantly, making sure they know that when they’re at work, their safety is the top priority. Because we’re not just talking about protecting workers. We’re talking about protecting their family and their neighbors and their community. It’s a huge responsibility which our members are living up to.”

Keith Gribbins is publisher of *Compact Equipment*.

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Toro Donates \$500K to Fight Impact of COVID-19

The Toro Co. announced in April that it was giving \$500,000 to assist families and communities worldwide that have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Grant funding from the Toro Foundation will span all regions where The Toro Co. operates and will focus on providing food, health and humanitarian assistance to helping people adversely impacted. An additional element of the global giving effort includes a special program for its employees who wish to personally give to designated COVID-19 relief organizations. Under the program, The Toro Co. will match employee contributions to a nonprofit organization of their choice in support of relief efforts. We think that’s pretty awesome. Big props, Toro. For more info, visit toro.com.

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