



COVID-19: Best Practices for Resuming Construction Projects

After a construction project has been postponed, or idled, for a prolonged period of time due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to ensure that proper notifications on the restart are made to all stakeholders and key personnel. It is equally important that critical systems, equipment, installations, and jobsite conditions are inspected for quality, and that practices are established to ensure the safety and well-being of the returning workforce. Some of the categories to consider with respect to project restarts include:

- Worker Safety
- Weather Damage
- Environmental Protection
- Material Protection and Quality Control
- Public Safety
- Fire Protection

Some guidelines and best practices to consider when resuming construction projects include the following:

Worker Safety

It is important to remain mindful of the OSHA General Duty Clause: 29 U.S.C. § 654, 5(a)1 that states “Each employer shall furnish to each of his employee’s employment, and a place of employment, which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to his employees.” As such owners and contractors should ensure policies/procedures have been established to preserve the health and safety of the returning workforce with respect to COVID-19, and that these procedures have been effectively communicated to all returning, or new, employees for the project. Some best practices for protecting workers can be found through resources such as the US Center for Disease Control (CDC) and thru OSHA (*ref. page 4 of*).

It is recommended that employers perform some type of pre-employment screening to ensure employees have not had exposure to a person infected with COVID-19, have not recently experienced any COVID-19-related symptoms, and that jobsite logistical plans can accommodate effective social distancing. It is also important to institute implement additional protective measures such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Examples of safety measures and tactics may include:

- Employee exposure questionnaires regarding exposure and symptoms
- Employee temperature screening
- Dedicated up/down stairwells

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- Limited occupancy of rooms, elevator cars, hoists, vehicles, etc.
- Restricted in-person meeting allowances and closure of group meeting/break areas
- Staggered start and break times to eliminate congregation at entry/exit ways and break rooms
- Provide additional sanitation facilities such as hand washing or changing facilities
- Increase the frequency and rigor of jobsite cleaning and disinfecting
- Ensure face coverings are used whenever adequate social distancing is unachievable

Regarding employee and employer rights related to health screening and hygiene requirements, the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission (EEOC) provides resources and addresses ADA concerns (*ref. page 4 of ...*).

Material Protection and Quality Control

Once a project restart is initiated, it is important to verify that the project complies with all state, city, and municipal orders regarding notice to proceed. It is equally important to ensure notifications are made to project-specific permitting authorities and insurance carriers. Once an updated schedule has been completed, the most accurate project schedule available should be provided to your risk/insurance groups and permitting authority to ensure coverages remain in place to help protect the project for its new anticipated duration.

Once permitted on-site, controlling contractors and project owners should conduct a detailed inspection of the site. The first step in site inspection should include a review of all critical tools and equipment needed to safely navigate the site. Some of these critical items include:

- Hoists, Elevators, and Cranes
- Lighting/Electrical Systems
- Plumbing/Drainage Systems
- Fire/Life Safety Systems
- Site Access Points (Gates/Doorways)
- Scaffolds/Sidewalk Sheds/Public Safety and Traffic Control Devices
- Guardrails/Hole Covers/Fall Protection Systems

Once it is determined that critical equipment is safe to operate, work around the team should continue with a thorough inspection that documents any unexpected changes to jobsite conditions, damage to equipment/materials, or any other abnormalities that are observed. Some things to look for include:

- Water intrusion
- Drywall deflection, swelling, discoloration, or moisture
- Corrosion or damage to electrical installations
- Damage to millwork
- Frozen pipe/ice damage
- Incomplete/Damaged Sprinklers and Standpipes
- Damage/corrosion to HVAC units/systems
- Flooring (water saturation/damage, excess dirt/wear, freeze/thaw damage)
- Broken glass/window and curtain wall
- Broken fixtures (toilets, sinks, kitchen equip., etc.)

Remember, it is also important to inspect offsite offices, storage, fabrication, and lay down areas for the same exposures that may be observed on-site and are included as part of the project.

Public Safety

As the project resumes, it is critical that public safety measures are evaluated to help ensure effectiveness and compliance with applicable regulations. In some situations, coordination or permitting with local authorities may be needed to ensure public safety and traffic control measures are administered effectively during the restart. This may include considerations for:

- Traffic Control
- Signs/Signals/Barricades
- Flaggers/Police Detail
- Road/Sidewalk Conditions (Cold Patch, Road Plates, Grade/etc.)
- Overhead Protection such as sidewalk sheds, scaffolds, and netting

The goal is to ensure project related operations have no adverse effect on any third parties who are not directly involved in the project but may need to use space at/around the project.

Weather Damage and Water Intrusion

If significant areas of the project have been damaged by weather or water during the site closure, it is important to document the loss and damage with photos, videos, and an accurate narrative thoroughly describing the impact. It is also important to ensure immediate notification is made to applicable risk and insurance representatives.

Environmental Protection

Inspect the project and its boundaries to ensure there has been no environmental contamination such as water runoff, or erosion, that has compromised the condition of the site or neighboring properties.

All soil erosion and control devices such as bulk storage coverings, hay-bails, swails, silt fence, storm drains, and culvert/drain ponds should be inspected for functionality.

An inventory of on-site chemicals and fuel storage should be conducted to properly record exposures prior to accepting new deliveries.

Fire Protection

Inspect prevention and response devices such as smoke and/or heat detectors, fire alarm systems, extinguishers, and water sources. Ensure these devices are in good working order.

Ensure clear access is provided for emergency vehicles leading into the project and that access ways have clear, unobstructed, walking paths.

Inspect Flammable/Combustible liquid storage areas to ensure adequate markings indicating their location and contents.

Attachments

CDC Safety Practices for Critical Infrastructure Workers

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/critical-workers/implementing-safety-practices.html>

CDC Guidelines for Cleaning and Disinfecting Prior to Re-Opening-

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>

OSHA Guidance on Preparing Workplaces

<https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>

OSHA Guidance for the Construction Workforce

<https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA4000.pdf>

EEOC/ADA Pandemic Guidance

https://www.eeoc.gov/facts/pandemic_flu.html

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