PANDEMIC: MANAGERS – ACTIVE CONSTRUCTION SITES

INTRODUCTION

During pandemics, construction sites may remain active as they are normally considered to be an essential business. As a pandemic progresses, many managers may not know what to do or what policies and guidelines to follow, as they can continually change. In this lesson, we will go over best practices recommended for active sites such as handwashing and other hygiene habits, social distancing, and offering support to employees.

AWARENESSES

One of the biggest challenges for managers can be raising awareness of an important issue. When dealing with a rampant disease and to help spread awareness of what the site is doing to combat it, it is first recommended that you prominently post signs at the entrance. These postings should contain information about the site's response to the pandemic and ask both visitors and employees to take extra precautions. Postings should include, but not be limited to, the following:

- When employees or guests are not allowed on the jobsite (i.e. if they are showing symptoms such as fever, coughing, shortness of breath, and any other flu-like symptoms);
- What employees and guests should do when they are on the jobsite (handwashing, social distancing, etc.); and
- Who employees or guests should notify if they are symptomatic.

HANDWASHING AND OTHER HYGIENE HABITS

To further help minimize the spread of disease on the site, you should encourage or require employees to wash their hands with soap and water for a minimum of 20 seconds. If soap or water are not available, employees should use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

In addition to handwashing, employees should avoid touching their faces as much as possible, and practice proper coughing and sneezing etiquette such as coughing or sneezing into their elbow or tissue. Also, remember that all used tissues should be thrown away after use and hands should be washed or sanitized after throwing away the tissue.

Unfortunately, even the best hygiene practices may not keep employees from getting sick. Therefore, if an employee starts to show symptoms while on the site, it is recommended that the employee be separated from healthy employees until such time that they can leave the site.

Questions? Call 1-800-734-3574

CLEANING AND SANITATION

Handwashing and sanitizing can only go so far in the protection of employees. Proper cleaning and sanitizing of the site should also be a priority for everyone on the worksite. Some specific methods may involve:

- A daily schedule for regular cleaning of commonly touched surfaces and providing disinfection wipes to do so. This should include the sanitizing of any reusable personal protective equipment and tools per the manufacturer's recommendations prior to each use.
- It could include requiring or recommending that employees wipe down door handles and surfaces with disinfection wipes after visitors leave; and even
- Keeping the jobsite clean and organized. Which can mean an increase of janitorial services for shared spaces such as office trailers.

SOCIAL DISTANCING

Additionally, while good hygiene and cleaning habits can go a long way in protecting employees on the site, it is recommended or sometimes required, that sites practice social distancing. Though each site may have it's own regulations, a general practice of social distancing means:

- Having employees and guests keep a minimum distance of 6 feet between each other, especially during lunch and other breaks.
- You may want to begin recommending that employees avoid carpooling whenever possible.
- This could also mean having meetings in outside areas such as parking lots as to allow employees to spread out to the appropriate distance; and most especially
- Having employees use alternatives to handshaking.

EMPLOYEE SUPPORT

Pandemics can cause a lot of emotional stress, so how do you help your employees through that? Though it will differ by employee and work situation, you may want to begin by:

- Encouraging employees who feel sick to stay home; and
- Giving symptomatic employees additional sick days to reduce incentives to come in when sick.
- Also, you may continue encouraging employees who have been exposed to self-quarantine for an appropriate amount of time, and who are in a position that allows them to telecommute (such as administrative employees working in trailers) to do so.
- Lastly, by providing all necessary cleaning supplies (such as disinfection wipes, bleach, hand sanitizer, etc.) you can help employees stay in compliance with all written and stated rules.

ADDITIONAL PRACTICES

Pandemics can be critical learning experiences and may change the way business is done short or long term. Any additional guidelines that will help you stay in compliance and keep employees from getting sick may be desired, Therefore, in addition to items previously mentioned, it is recommended that you:

- Adjust schedules to have 10 or fewer workers at a time at residential sites.
- Arrange building inspections so that the inspector is the only one present.
- Discourage employees from sharing hand and power tools.
- Have employees use disposable gloves whenever possible and wash or sanitize hands after use.
- Although it may be difficult at times, make sure you discourage the sharing of personal protective equipment such as goggles, gloves, masks, respirators, etc.
- When it comes to food and drink, encourage employees to use their own water bottles while on site; and
- Discourage the sharing of food and also have no communal food available.
- It is vital that you frequently service and sanitize portable toilets and washing stations and have hand sanitizer stations around the jobsite; and finally,
- Have employees change clothes prior to going home.

CONCLUSION

To review, know that construction sites play an important role in the country's economy and communities. As managers, there are many steps you can take to help keep employees healthy while the jobsite is active. You can encourage employees and visitors to follow the rules that will help you finish the project and keep the surrounding community safe.