

Responsible, safe construction site practices can guide Ontario industry through COVID-19 crisis

VAUGHAN (March 25, 2020) – In these unprecedented times of uncertainty and confusion, the construction and design industry has collaborated to develop a guide of best practices and resources in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Construction and Design Alliance of Ontario, which represents a unified voice for the infrastructure sector and represents 15 provincial trade, professional and industry associations, is calling on all employers, supervisors and workers to follow the steps outlined in this document, in order to keep our sites healthy and safe.

“The health, safety and wellness of all our people has always been paramount for our members”, states Sandro Perruzza, CEO of the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers, and Chair of the Construction & Design Alliance of Ontario. “It is everyone’s responsibility to work in a manner that protects the health and safety of not only yourself, but of your fellow worker. These guidelines are your best bet to ensure that not only are you safe, but that you go back home to your family healthy at the end of the day”.

Clive Thurston, CEO of the Ontario General Contractors Association, confirms that “OGCA has a strong reputation and mandate for the promotion of health and safety in construction in the province of Ontario. We strongly support the collaborative efforts of all members of the CDAO in helping to reduce these documents and best practices to help the industry. The health and safety of our workforce and our industry is our number one priority.”

The industry best practice guide includes seven safety recommendations developed by leading health and safety experts in Ontario’s Infrastructure sector and have been endorsed by both labour and management representatives. They come from a document developed by CDAO members called [“COVID-19: What you need to know about Health and Safety and Working On-Site.”](#) They include the following:

- 1. Maintain good personal hygiene:** Everyone should avoid touching their faces with unwashed hands. Cough and sneeze into your elbow or a tissue and wash your hands often.
- 2. On-site Sanitation:** During this time, site owners must provide access to more washroom facilities and to handwash stations with soap and water. Commonly touched surfaces or areas (hoists, site trailers, door handles, equipment or residential units), must have an increased cleaning schedule to ensure these surfaces are cleaned frequently.
- 3. Practise physical distancing:** Employers can stagger start times, breaks and lunches, and limit the total number of people on site. Coordinate pinch points, including hoists and site trailers, to keep people safely apart (one metre away or more). Limit unnecessary on-site contact with outside service providers. For example, ban the coffee truck from visiting the site.
- 4. Communicate policies:** It is essential that employers ensure everyone on site have a clear understanding of these new roles and responsibilities outlined in the guidelines. COVID-19 policies need to be posted and communicated to all workers, contractors, professionals and trades, including the new sanitization practices, promoting physical distancing and informing how work will be scheduled and coordinated.

5. Protect your family and housemates: On-site workers should wash clothes at the end of the workday as soon as they get home.

6. Report illness: Everyone should notify their supervisor and call public health immediately if you experience cold or flu-like symptoms. They must go home and self-isolate for 14 days after the symptoms subside. When home, complete the self-assessment on the Ontario COVID-19 website (<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment>), or call telehealth (1-866-797-0000), your local public health unit or your family physician.

7. Track sick workers: This will allow employers to better inform public health officials if issues arise on site or with the worker at home. In addition, keeping health and safety representatives, the joint health and safety committee and trade union representatives informed will increase transparency and build trust and confidence in the workplace.

Perruzza adds: “if any worker feels uneasy or that the conditions are not safe, we encourage them to bring their concerns forward to their supervisor so that they can be immediately addressed. The Occupational Health and Safety Act allows workers to refuse unsafe work, and these protections are still there for the worker.”

“We are all working together to ensure these sites are healthy and safe, but we are also realize that workplace sites are dynamic and constantly changing. As such, it is imperative that all workplace parties, including health and safety practitioners continuously monitor the situation and adapt these protocols to meet the unique needs of the situation.”

Thurston concludes, “In these very challenging times we are all coming together to support one another support our associations our members in our industry there is never been a greater challenge to survival of that industry and we will continue to work to provide all that is necessary for the survival of our employees and the survival of our industry.”

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