

COVID-19 RESOURCE CENTER

Guidance to Construction Sites Operating During COVID-19

April 8, 2020

While the Provincial Health Officer for British Columbia (“PHO”) has ordered some types of businesses to close in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the PHO has expressed that "essential services" should - and are encouraged to remain open, and has identified construction work as an essential service.

Despite being categorized as an essential service, construction work should still follow the orders and guidance provided by the PHO for safe operations and so as to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

While the PHO issued an order on March 16, 2020, prohibiting the gathering of people in excess of 50 people at a place of which a person is the owner, occupier or operator, or for which they are otherwise responsible, this order does not apply to construction sites as a whole.

The PHO subsequently provided further guidance for the operation of construction sites on March 22, 2020, directing employers to take all necessary precautions to minimize the risks of COVID-19 transmission and illness to themselves and their employees.

These directions include:

- There should be no more than 50 people in the same space in any circumstances.
- Where possible, employees should maintain a distance of two meters apart from each other.
- Employers should:
 - Post signage that limits the number of occupants in any elevator to four people at a time.
 - Reduce in-person meetings and other gatherings and hold site meetings in open spaces or outside.
 - Increase the number of handwashing stations and post signage that identifies their location.
 - Maintain a list of employees that are currently working on sites and update this list daily.

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- All common areas and surfaces should be cleaned at the end of each day. Examples include washrooms, shared offices, common tables, desks, light switches and door handles.
- Anyone with COVID-19-like symptoms, such as sore throat, fever, sneezing or coughing, must self-isolate at home for 14 days.

The PHO has not provided further clarification with respect to the meaning of "same space", such as threshold dimensions for interior or exterior spaces, or whether employees that are all at least two meters apart from one another, but total more than 50 employees may nonetheless still be in the "same space".

The PHO has also noted an employer's obligation pursuant to section 4.85 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, noting minimum standards for washroom and hand washing facilities. For instance, where plumbed facilities are impracticable, employers are to provide access to portable washroom and hand washing facilities, which should be maintained in good working order, and be equipped with the supplies necessary for their use.

Additionally, WorkSafeBC has indicated that it will be working with workers, employers, and industry associations to ensure construction sites are healthy and safe during the COVID-19 outbreak. Prevention officers will be conducting worksite inspections to ensure that everyone in the workspace is fulfilling their obligations in line with the PHO's guidance in order to limit COVID-19 exposure and transmission.

For further information, please see the following:

- Government of British Columbia's List of COVID-19 Essential Services: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/covid-19-provincial-support/essential-services-covid-19>.
- PHO's Order regarding Mass Gatherings: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/reports-publications/covid-19-pho-class-order-mass-gatherings.pdf>.
- PHO's Guidance to construction sites operating during COVID-19: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19-pho-guidance-construction-sites.pdf>.

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- BC Centre for Disease Control - COVID-19: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19>.



Rob Davis
Associate
250 869 3874
rdavis@farris.com
Bio

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