

Labor and Management Work Together During the COVID-19 Crisis



As you know, most of construction was deemed essential infrastructure and allowed to continue under Federal and State guidelines and orders during the COVID-19 crisis. But it is not “business as usual” for the industry. Even before the “Safer at Home” order was issued on March

24, labor and management worked cooperatively to develop mitigation strategies to keep workers and the public safe while construction work continued.

As the COVID-19 pandemic progressed, labor and management continued to work together to create new workflow processes to protect workers from infection while enabling work to continue on critical Wisconsin building programs. In partnership with the trades and contractor associations, CBG released a video that details prevention techniques for job sites that will enable workers to stay safe while continuing to work.

CBG and its partners also launched a website www.constructsafewi.com specifically dedicated to educating construction workers and contractors on

recommended safety guidelines. The website has further links to field manuals and toolkits being offered by the trades and contractor associations. The Operating Engineers and CBG created banners that may be posted on job sites that list some of the most important safety guidelines to give workers a visual reminder every day that things are not business as usual on the job sites.

The Wisconsin construction industry employs 94,200 workers and generates \$7.71 billion in economic impact for communities across the state. With new public health guidelines in place, the construction industry can continue to provide a vital economic value while ensuring our communities remain healthy.

CBG would like to thank labor and management for working quickly, efficiently, and cooperatively during this unprecedented crisis.

Robb Kahl,
CBG Executive Director

CONSTRUCT A SAFE WISCONSIN

1 DISTANCE yourself 6 feet from others

2 WASH your hands for 20 seconds

3 COVER your coughs and sneezes

4 AVOID touching your face

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Is your jobsite meeting recommended COVID-19 safety guidelines?
If not, call us at (262) 200-1359.

www.ConstructSafeWI.com



Basic Safety Guidelines

By Edna Baldwin

As COVID-19 spreads across the nation, construction in Wisconsin has been deemed essential infrastructure. The Wisconsin construction industry is committed to the health, safety, and welfare of its workforce and the public.

Construction companies are encouraged to create and implement a written COVID-19 Response Plan. While each company's written plan will be unique to the operations under its control, the following are recommended safety guidelines that workers should implement on project sites:

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Employees should at least stay within 6' of each other, EXCEPT as may be necessary for an immediate safety reason (e.g., rigging requiring more than one person for a brief period).

Construction work in enclosed or partially enclosed spaces will have no more than ten people working in any one area with 6' of separation.

PERSONAL HYGIENE & CLEAN WORKSPACES

Follow sanitary processes implemented throughout the job site (e.g., soap, hand sanitizer, single-use gloves, doors propped open, hands-free capabilities, no shared food).

Disinfection of surfaces that receive frequent human contact multiple times daily.

PRE-SCREEN

Regular body temperature scans may be performed for all on-site employees (contingent on availability of scanning devices, which are in short supply due to acute global demand). In the absence of access to a scanning device, employees may be asked to take their temperatures daily and report any reading over 99 degrees before entering the job site.

EMPLOYEES' EDUCATION

Be informed of the safety guidelines posted by your company-specific Response Plan in its multiple ways, such as job site posting, email transmission, etc.

AWARENESS OF THE ACCESS CONTROL TO WORKSITES

Staggered job site entry and exit procedures.

No deliveries except those that support production activities or emergency building maintenance.

No visitors (including suppliers and customers) except those approved by senior management.

FOLLOW COMPANIES' ACTION PLANS AND POLICIES

Reduction of job site work hours to the minimum needed to sustain operations.

Staggered shifts and work hours to minimize job site human presence at a given time.

Following the best practices to protect workers and their families from exposure to COVID-19, while supporting the state's critical infrastructure and providing the income for the people who work on those projects, is necessary to the safe, continued operation of construction job sites during this unprecedented crisis. You may see banners or flyers at job sites as visual reminders of some of the most important safety guidelines. The flyers contain a contact telephone number for staff at CBG for workers who have questions or believe their job site is unsafe. More information may also be found at www.constructsafewi.com.

A successful project takes everyone involved. By making changes to the job site, we can complete our projects while keeping our communities safe. Together, we can Construct A Safe Wisconsin.



Reevaluating Recruiting Strategies Before The Rebound

By Laura Cataldo, Senior Manager, Construction & Real Estate Services, Baker Tilly Virchow Krause, LLP

It seems like yesterday, the economy was humming along, and workforce shortages were a top concern for most contractors. Fast forward a few months, COVID-19 is still front page, and the workforce discussion has shifted to, “How do we protect our employees from mass layoffs, keep them safe from the virus and survive as a business?”

Luckily in Wisconsin, because construction was defined as an essential activity, construction employees were able to work, support their families, and contribute to their communities. Today, businesses are looking to the future and a rebound that Anirban Basu of Sage Policy Group predicts “will be sharp, profound and most welcome.” He cites low-interest rates, pent-up demand, and the need to rebuild inventories and reengage with human activities as the primary reasons why the recovery will be swift.

This pause between today and the economic rebound is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity (hopefully) to slow down from a frantic pace and assess if the business practices of the past will serve us well in the future. There are many examples of how our industry adapted during the coronavirus pandemic – operations, process, communication, technology, and the list goes on. How have you changed your talent recruitment efforts? During this challenging time, companies likely describe talent management more in terms of triage than a dedicated effort to be well-positioned with talent for the rebound, which we hope is not a matter of “if” but “when.”

With optimism in mind, the construction industry needs to maintain a focus on recruiting and retaining talent to avoid the challenges we experienced following the 2010 recession. Our industry lost a significant number of experienced employees and created a pipeline deficit by not focusing on attracting and engaging the younger generation. The failure to invest in “building the pipeline” created a workforce crisis felt by many throughout the last ten years. When we rebound from this pandemic, companies will again be focused on finding the right talent. Companies that previously abandoned their strategies to hire, develop, and retain top talent will struggle to meet the opportunities of the economic rebound.

Reevaluating Recruiting Strategies

Over the next five to seven years, millions of baby boomers will continue to retire, and young adults will likely still feel pressured to pursue a four-year degree and land a white-collar job instead of learning a trade. Many companies boast about their efforts to recruit millennials. However, millennials were ages 23-38 in 2019, which means companies are nearing the end of the road to attract this cohort to construction careers. Now is the ideal time to shift the focus to attracting younger people (Generation Z) to our industry. Gen Z are currently 9-22 years old, graduating high school by the millions, and very different from past generations. They will emerge from this pandemic with a renewed need to contribute to their communities in a career that is not only rewarding but defined as essential.

How do we turn these generational traits into an opportunity for our industry during the pandemic pause? Consider how your company has adapted its business during the pandemic to appeal to Gen Z:

Increased use of technology – Social distancing required contractors to utilize technology in many new ways from the use of drones for site safety inspections to apps for employee wellness check-ins, and remote workplaces connected by shared files.

Reliance on new communication tools – Stay-at-home orders in many states required businesses to adapt to new means of communicating. Safety huddles were held via Zoom, team coordination meetings happened virtually, and app-based communication tools automated activities previously handled via fax, mail, and email. For an industry that was reluctant to embrace remote working, we adopted quickly due to necessity.

Construction is essential – We all understand the “career image” challenges the construction industry has faced in the past. The coronavirus pandemic positioned the construction industry as equal to many well-respected occupations such as healthcare, emergency responders, and banking because of being deemed “essential” to our communities’ safety and health. We know that Gen Z wants to make a difference both personally and professionally. The construction industry will come out of this pandemic with many examples of how we made an impact during unprecedented times.

Financial security – The record levels of unemployment from the closure of retail, hospitality, and manufacturing during the coronavirus pandemic will have a long-term economic impact on their former workforce. The construction industry has been able to continue working, even if at reduced levels, demonstrating the financial stability that well-paying construction careers offer.

This pause in time allows the construction industry to “fill the pipeline” by demonstrating how resilient and adaptable it is because of increased use in technology, new means of communication, and our necessary and meaningful contributions to society.

Applying New Recruiting Strategies

A successful recruitment strategy requires that companies provide an opportunity for exploration, education, and engagement. With schools across the nation moving from brick and mortar to virtual classrooms, we need to consider practical strategies for both today and when life resumes at a normal pace.

Exploration: Attending career fairs and presenting at high schools are excellent ways of reaching out to students and helping them explore the industry. With schools uncertain if or how they will commence school in the fall, teachers are scrambling to deliver learning virtually. Reach out to your local school and offer to do virtual exploration with students. Show students the latest in technology, demonstrate how building information modeling (BIM) and virtual reality (VR) allow virtual walk-throughs, explain advances in prefabrication and manufacturing or walk through an estimating exercise with a math class. With social

distancing in mind, we must remain creative in finding new ways to help students explore the industry.

Education: Wisconsin Operating Engineers has invested in the online pre-apprenticeship program through Destinations Career Academy. The program is a perfect model for schools to embrace as they struggle with meeting student course needs while balancing new safety precautions. We have worked hard over the last 5-10 years to interest this next generation in the construction industry. If we stop now, it may be hard to get them back, as they will find other industries that will provide them with work experience. How can we continue to provide this valuable learning opportunity for young people today? Students currently signed up for work release, school-to-work, or summer intern programs may suddenly find themselves with ample time and schedules flexible to work. Reconsider rescinding offers to provide these work experiences – instead, view it as an investment in your future talent pipeline.

Engagement: Employee engagement has become a buzzword in HR circles. Engaged employees work with passion and feel a strong connection to their company. These employees drive innovation and advance the organization, which is why many companies use surveys to measure attributes related to engagement and culture, such as:

- I am proud to work at...
- I have recently received praise...
- I like the direction [company] is going...
- I would recommend [company] to a friend...
- My supervisor cares about me...

Many leadership articles are addressing how important it is throughout the pandemic to preserve employee engagement and culture. Your company has likely tried to address this need to support its culture by protecting the health and safety of your employees and their families, regular personal outreach by managers to employees, company-wide communication and praise for great efforts during a challenging time. These efforts boost your employees’ engagement and every future employee your company interacts with, whether through social media or direct exchange. The way your company responds during this unprecedented time is an opportunity to build engagement with both current and future employees. Be proud of your efforts and publicly share them – non-employees will notice and look favorably on your company as a potential employer of choice.

The workforce shortages we struggled with in January 2020 are not going to disappear when we rebound from COVID-19. Look in the rear view mirror at what happened after the 2008-2010 recession, when we failed to invest in “building the pipeline.” Take advantage of this pause before the rebound to reevaluate and revise business strategies and practices. Learn from the past lessons and commit to new strategies to attract talent that will position your company to thrive when (not if) the economy rebounds.