LESSONS LEARNED:

5 COVID Safety Measures that Should Remain on Jobsites

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Lessons Learned:
Why these 5 COVID safety measures should remain on jobsites

The COVID-19 pandemic sent shock waves through every corner of our lives, upending how we live and work. Masks became mandatory. Social distancing was required. And companies sent workers home, staggered shifts and stopped projects altogether to limit the spread of the coronavirus and keep workers safe.

On construction jobsites, contractors and owners faced a cascade of new guidelines, requirements and delays — from mandated business closures to new safety protocols, supply chain issues and hold ups getting permits and approvals. After a promising start to the year, the U.S. engineering and construction industry ended 2020 with a loss of $60.9 billion in gross domestic product and 1.14 million fewer jobs, according to Deloitte's 2021 engineering and construction industry outlook.

INDUSTRY Outlook

As we emerge from the pandemic, the forecast isn't all bad; Deloitte's outlook for the industry predicts an **increase in public and commercial spending in 2021**. But if we've learned anything from 2020, it's that it's impossible to predict what 2021 and beyond will hold. And that's exactly why it's not time to shed those extra efforts you added in 2020 to keep workers safe.

Here are five safety measures that should carry forward on construction sites even as the pandemic wanes, and why they're not just good for your people, but also your bottom line.

1 | RETHINKING SICK DAYS

You've heard of absenteeism, when employees skip work for no reason at all. But what about presenteeism, when workers come into work even when they are sick or injured?

Before COVID, it wasn't unheard of for workers to come to jobsites with congestion, a sprained ankle or even a full-blown fever. While they might have been on the job, they weren't at full capacity. But, in the last year, we've learned better as we've implemented health screenings and temperature checks and required workers to stay home with symptoms of COVID.

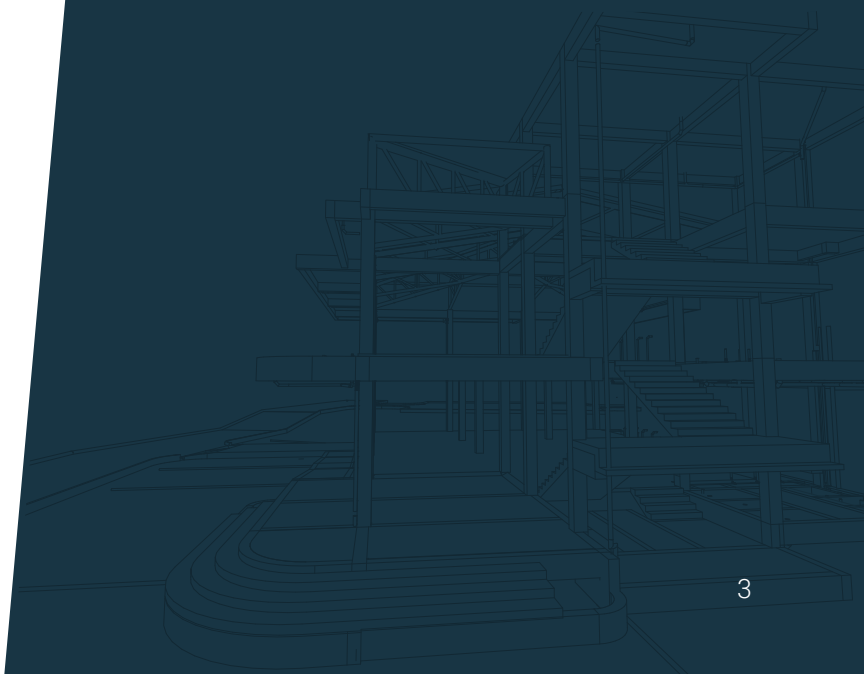
Hopefully we'll never experience a pandemic again in our lifetimes, but infectious diseases, including the flu or norovirus, can be costly for companies if the illness spreads among workers. And, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, construction workers can have a higher risk of exposure to COVID, the flu and other contagious diseases because of the nature of their work.

Now that we know the damage that a pandemic can do when we're not prepared, it's smart to remain ready for the next crisis and keep these new practices in place, said Devin Norris, environment, health and safety lead at Triax.

"Even with something as simple as the flu, they should go on offense and know what to do ahead of time. When somebody is sick, know what the protocol is and whether they want this person coming into work," he said.

ABSENTEEISM VS. Presenteeism

One study from Virgin Pulse found that while employees usually took about four sick days each year, they were present at work, but not in mind, for 57.5 days each year — or nearly 12 working weeks. Presenteeism cost companies in the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom $1,500 billion—10 times more than absenteeism.



2 | SHIFTING THE WORKFORCE

Staggered shifts, remote work and adding extra break areas for workers all were changes construction companies made during COVID to limit the number of workers gathering on the job. Going forward, these strategies can continue to keep workers safe and prevent bottlenecks.

Instead of subs bumping into each other during traditional work hours, schedules could remain shifted so fewer people are on the jobsite at any given time. Even as some offices reopen, many office workers are clamoring to continue to work from home, which could add up to savings for companies who won't need as much office space. And additional break areas mean shorter queues for workers as they take a lunch break or use other facilities.

The experience of the past year raises the question "how many people need to be on site for all these jobs," Norris said. "Most of these companies cut that by quite a bit and did just fine."

REMOTE WORK Remains

Office workers want to keep working from home, and employers see the benefits.

According to a Mercer study:

» **94% of employers** said productivity is the same or improved since employees started working remotely.

» **83% of employers** say they will offer flexible working arrangements at a greater scale after COVID.

3 | FOCUSING ON HEALTH

The construction industry has long used personal protective equipment to keep workers safe. But the pandemic prompted the need for other health and safety measures, including the installation of hand-washing or hand sanitizer stations and additional cleaning in shared spaces. In some cases, workers stopped passing protective gear, such as hard hats or gloves that might have been shared in the past, between them as they could become vectors for transmission of COVID or another infectious illness.

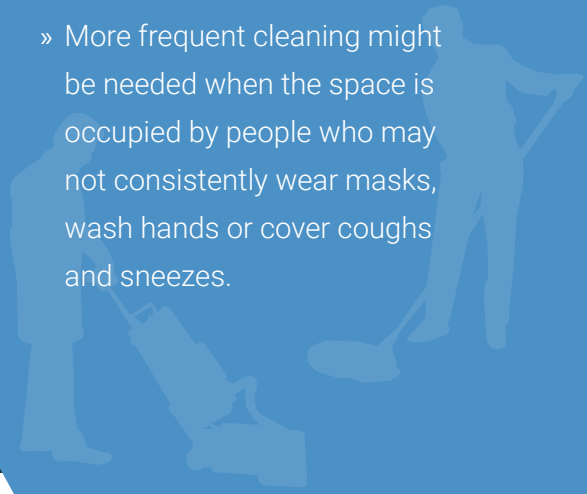
As a result of lessons learned during the pandemic, Norris expects to see more regulations and guidelines related to maintaining safe workplaces, and that could extend to rules that cover cleanliness and personal protection. He envisions separate protocols based on different scenarios within a community — when there is no illness, during regular flu season and during a pandemic.

How Often to **CLEAN**

Public areas should be cleaned frequently to prevent the transmission of disease.

According to the CDC,

- High-touch surfaces should be cleaned at least once a day.
- More frequent cleaning might be needed when the space is occupied by people who may not consistently wear masks, wash hands or cover coughs and sneezes.



4 | DEPLOYING NEW TECHNOLOGIES

For safety measures and contact tracing purposes, new technologies have become an integral part of many jobsites across the country. Sensors alert workers when they are too close together and not maintaining a physical distance from others. Devices monitor the movements of workers on jobsites to ensure they aren't congregating in places where COVID could spread. The technologies also provide valuable insights to employers, especially when a worker tests positive for COVID. With it, site managers can quickly pull up information about who that individual may have been working alongside.

But, going forward, even without COVID, these technologies provide valuable safety strategies for construction sites. With wearable devices in particular, companies can monitor the movement of workers, subcontractors and visitors on jobsites to ensure that they are not in harm's way. When paired with equipment, the devices can signal whether a worker has the correct certifications to operate a backhoe or forklift—and prevent a costly accident. And when the devices are attached to materials, site managers can immediately find the location of everything from yesterday's shipment of drywall to the bathroom fixtures delivered two weeks ago, so workers aren't aimlessly looking for them across a jobsite.

In all cases, these technologies can not only make jobsites safer, but more productive.

> "I think, eventually, this is a company badge that demonstrates that the company just does more. It holds your training on it, it knows when your next training is needed. It knows what certifications you have and when they expire. It knows where you're located within a facility and where you're not supposed to go or what machine you're not allowed to turn on. And then on top of that, it's used for contact tracing when the time comes necessary."
>
> **Devin Norris**
> Environment, Health and Safety Lead
> Triax Technologies

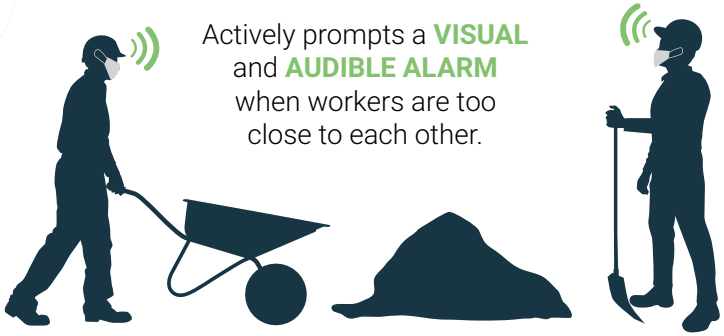
5 | CONDUCTING INSPECTIONS REMOTELY

As COVID prevented contractors and inspectors from traveling to jobsites, remote inspections have been trending. Now, through something as simple as a video conference call, site managers can walk inspectors through a facility to satisfy any mandatory checks. Autonomous rovers and drones, notes the Deloitte outlook for 2021, are other ways to conduct remote site inspections. These inspections remain an important way to ensure workplace safety, but they also cut down dramatically on the cost and time required to shepherd individuals through a site.

PREVENTION is key

We're all eager to return to some version of normal after living through a pandemic. But lessons learned during COVID could help prevent the next tragedy or costly illness on a jobsite, long after the pandemic is over.

Proximity Trace is a wearable IoT solution from Triax Technologies for social distancing and contact tracing.



Actively prompts a **VISUAL** and **AUDIBLE ALARM** when workers are too close to each other.

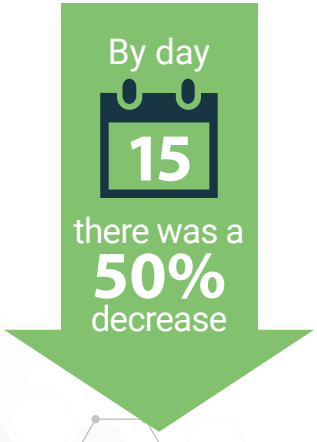
Workers are conditioned over time to reduce their number of interactions each day

On a sample of clients sites, 15 days after the deployment of Proximity Trace there was a **50% decrease in the number of daily worker interactions.**

Proximity Trace

During COVID, Triax's Proximity Trace has provided peace of mind for general contractors and construction company owners. Workers wear the device, called a TraceTag, on their hardhat or clipped to their shirt or safety vest. Gateways that collect data from the devices are placed at exits and high traffic areas on jobsites.

- In the form of a visual and audible alarm, it provides **active feedback** when workers get too close to each other.
- And for site managers and contractors, they get a **passive collection** of data about worker interactions, which has proved critical when somebody tests positive for COVID.



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