
CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

COVID-19 BUSINESS UPDATE



As COVID-19 continues to impact Canadian businesses, the construction industry has not been immune from the labour disruptions caused by the virus. In response to the widespread concerns over COVID-19, on March 23rd, 2020 the Ontario Government ordered the closure of all non-essential workplaces and released a list of businesses permitted to stay open.

The order requiring the temporary closure of non-essential businesses was made pursuant to Section 7.0.2(4) of the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act (“EMCPA”). On the list of essential businesses, construction projects and services related to healthcare, industrial, commercial, institutional and residential sectors are required to continue operations.

Following the announcement, there have been several occurrences of construction workers voicing their concerns and urging the Ontario Government to provide updated guidance for employers to temporarily shut down non-essential work sites for two weeks in an attempt to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Construction workers have expressed that employers are not considering the magnitude of the crisis and are not adequately protecting the health and safety of their workers.

The Ontario Construction Consortium (“OCC”) and Carpenter’s District Council of Ontario (“CDCO”) are advocating for the Ontario Government to suspend work on construction sites for at least two weeks to protect workers.

An executive from the CDCO stated that many work sites have either inadequate or no facilities for workers to wash their hands using soap. Further, workers are unable to practice social distancing as contractors work in close proximity with each other and are unable to maintain the recommended minimum distance of 6 feet (2 meters) apart on work sites.

In Quebec, CSD-Construction, a trade union representing construction workers are demanding the Quebec Government to impose a fine of \$50,000, including license suspensions for repeat offenders, against employers that do not adhere to the measures and guidelines recommended to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Throughout the country construction unions are voicing their concerns about the health and safety of its member and describing the poor working conditions their members are being subjected to.

In British Columbia, the BC Building Trades Council has revealed that construction workers are reporting to work while visibly sick and do not have access to proper facilities or provided hand sanitizer.

In respect to the COVID-19 outbreak, Ontario Premier Doug Ford has called for increased diligence on contractors and advised there will be increased inspection of work sites by the Ministry of Labour inspectors to ensure employers are following the recommendations of the government. However, the OCC warns that there are simply not enough inspectors to visit the thousands of work sites across Ontario and that further intervention by the Ontario Government is required.

As the response to COVID-19 is evolving each day, from a business continuity perspective, we recommend employers, contractors, suppliers and other stakeholders to continue to stay informed as new developments affecting the industry emerge during these unprecedented times. We will continue to bring you more information as it becomes available.

