

Construction Firms Navigate New California Lockdown Mandate

Gov. Gavin Newsom orders 40 million residents to shelter at home, but exempts some workers.



Newsom tells 40 million Californians to stay home. *Image courtesy Office of the Governor*

March 20, 2020

Greg Aragon

Construction industry professionals across California are scrambling to comply with and make sense of a statewide order to shelter in place, which could impact many projects.

The March 19 order by Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) to help slow the spread of COVID-19 instructs all Californians to stay at home, except "as needed to maintain continuity of operations of the federal critical infrastructure sectors."

As of March 20 the state had recorded 1,006 COVID-19 cases and 19 deaths.

[For ENR's latest coverage of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, click here](#)

In response to a request for clarity on construction project operating status from AGC of California, the Newsom administration updated its order and exempted those that “maintain continuity of operation of the federal critical infrastructure sectors, critical government services, schools, childcare, and construction, including housing construction.”

Despite the governor’s clarification, there is still uncertainty.

“It’s been challenging interpreting the stay-at-home executive order issued and how this affects construction, especially on such short notice,” says James Awford, a principal with San Diego-based BNBuilders. “We are making necessary adjustments in how we perform work safely while maintaining productivity on site as much as possible. There’s been a lot of questions and concerns surrounding the executive order ... and we are working closely with our owners, subcontractors, industry partners and staff to get through this.”

He says many firm clients are in the life science, pharmaceutical, education and healthcare markets “that need us to finish critical and essential projects during this crisis.”

Since the shelter-in-place order, Matthew J. Semic, a principal with San Diego-based Latitude 33 Planning and Engineering, says his entire business has quickly transitioned to a “virtual world, as have the agencies, our clients and consulting partners. We will certainly experience inefficiencies, but for the most part we have quickly adapted.”

Because of COVID-19, he says every Latitude 33 staff member now works remotely. “We first started this on an elective basis at the beginning of the week, so by the time the lockdown came we were already transitioned and had worked out the technical challenges,” Semic says.

He adds that his company is hosting virtual meetings via Skype, join.me and Zoom, communicating in real time with messaging software, coordinating projects and tasks through Microsoft Teams, and posting progress in Bluebeam Studio Sessions for interactive commenting.

San Jose-based electrical contractor Rosendin also is using social media to communicate with employees. Matt Englert, chief operating officer, says the company is hosting online town hall meetings with the corporate executive committee

to provide updates for employees and created an email address for employees to post questions.

“We are doing our best to give responses back and provide our organization with confidence that we are monitoring the situation and staying on top of the changing orders, and letting everybody know how the landscape is changing daily,” he says.

Englert says Rosendin had to react very quickly and become “flexible and fluid” to deal with the last-minute shelter-in-place order. He says the company started a telecommute policy to reduce the office headcount by 50%, “and on the essential infrastructure projects and essential services projects that Rosendin is still working on, we have safety measures in place that are in line with the CDC guidelines, such as safety masks, gloves, social distancing and no gatherings.”

Awford says BNBuilders has spent “considerable time reviewing its safety program with enhanced project specific safety plans and pandemic protocols to keep everyone safe,” including limiting visitors and in-person meetings, work from home strategies and other preventative measures.

Semic says Latitude 33 has created an environment to continue performing its daily job functions, without the need for any personal and public interaction.

He adds: “The technology is fantastic, but is certainly not sustainable in our industry as a replacement to our conventional approach to business.”

<https://www.enr.com/articles/48970-construction-firms-navigate-new-california-lockdown-mandate>