



MEDIA RELEASE

Construction coalition calls for sensible COVID-19 policy to protect health of industry

A coalition of building unions and employer bodies has formed a working group in response to the challenges being thrown up by coronavirus (COVID-19) and its potential impact on the construction industry, and is working with the Victorian Premier's Department and Deputy Chief Medical Officer to minimise the physical and economic threats COVID-19 presents.

The 'Industry Associations and Trade Unions' working group presented a united front to develop a sensible response to the COVID-19 crisis which balances the health and safety of workers with the necessity of keeping the critical industry functioning.

'Right now everyone in the construction industry is consumed with two priorities: foremost keeping our workforce physically healthy, but also looking to keep the engine-room of the Victorian economy financially healthy,' said John Kilgour, CEO of Civil Contractors Federation of Victoria (CCF).

'The construction industry is critical to the health of the Victorian economy, providing 100s of thousands of jobs both directly and indirectly, and which accounts for 45% of our state's tax revenue.'

The working group has advanced and supported a series of measures to help contain any potential outbreaks outlined in a report by the Master Builders Association of Victoria and the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU).

These measures include enforced social distancing, staggered shifts, industrial grade cleaning products, additional cleaning, site inductions, education, and a process for identifying and responding to risks.

In the event that a site does have to close, the working group is seeking clarity on who will pay workers, and has proposed the Victorian Building Industry Disputes Panel (VBIDP) establishes guidelines for the settlement and arbitration of such questions.



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The working group is proposing the VBIDP produce guidelines around financial matters which include: staggering work hours before retrenchment, that employers can request workers use RDOs, personal leave and annual leave, and a series of hardship payments from Redundancy Fund providers.

'We've got to protect health and safety while ensuring contractors businesses remain viable, workers have jobs and that our industry keeps delivering the critical infrastructure projects this state needs during unprecedented and difficult times,' said Mr Kilgour.

'We want to avoid closures by instituting world's best practice when it comes to preventive measures and hygiene, but if a site does have to close, we want to make sure both employees and employers are financially protected and supported.

'A lot of contractors have massive capital investments to service so the premature or unnecessary winding down of the construction industry will have dramatic effects for those employers, their staff, and ultimately the Victorian economy,' said Mr Kilgour.

The working group is continuing to work in collaboration with the Victorian Government and the Deputy Chief Medical Officer, with the health and well-being of construction workers and the broader community first and paramount.

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Available for comment: John Kilgour, CEO, Civil Contractors Federation (Vic)

Enquiries: David Latham, Good Talent Media, 0479 130 242



Gallagher

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