

## **Building, Construction and Development Industry COVID-19**

### **Working to Keep Victoria Safe – 26 July 2020**

#### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1. To provide continuing confidence to the Premier and Crisis Council of Cabinet that, as representatives of the building, construction and development industry, our work alongside the Victorian Government to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is our singular focus in the coming months, as we work to protect our workers and community, and maintain a strong state and national economy.
- 1.2. To inform the Victorian Government of proactive measures and actions implemented across the industry, led by unions, employers and stakeholders, to manage the challenges of COVID-19 and maintain safe operations across the building, construction and development sector.
- 1.3. To seek consultation on potential containment measures which will have short-term and long-term impacts on the building, construction and development industry and ensure that the Victorian Government has necessary information that may assist decision making.

#### **2. Commitment to a Strong Building, Construction and Development Industry during COVID-19**

The building, construction and development industry is committed to responding in a way that supports the Victorian Government's suppression strategy for COVID-19, as well as minimising long and short-term economic and community implications. We are actively working together to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of everyone in our sector. The industry has responded swiftly and collaboratively to manage the challenges of COVID-19 confronting us now and strengthening capability for recovery.

As Victoria grapples with a bleak economic outlook, ongoing confidence and certainty in the building, construction and development industry's ability to continue to operate is vital as it is a major contributor to the State's taxation, revenue and employment base. The value of construction work undertaken per annum in Victoria is over \$57 billion, representing almost 13% of Victoria's Gross State Product and accounting for over 45% of the State's tax revenue. Construction employs nearly 1 in 10 workers in Victoria, this is approximately 300,000 people in full and part-time positions in over 200,000 businesses.

As the pandemic has progressed in Victoria, the building, construction and development industry has recorded a job loss of around 8,300 or 3% decline from the first quarter of 2020. The strain on the industry is also evident as residential building approvals declined by nearly 15% in the June quarter, with the greatest falls being in multi-unit approvals. Whilst forecasts still predict a reasonable pipeline of activity across our industry, it is expected to reduce by over \$6 billion, with more than \$2 billion in lost tax revenue for the State. The Victorian Government's formal recognition of the vital importance of our industry through two key Statements of Commitment, has saved unprecedented hardship for businesses, workers and their families and ultimately limited the burden on the Victorian economy.

The industry continues to make a significant contribution to Victorians by building and enhancing our urban form and delivering infrastructure and carrying out work that keeps our critical services and facilities running including hospitals, medical and allied health facilities, education facilities and utilities, as well as supporting and maintaining the needs of growing residential communities.

To support the Victorian economy through the COVID-19 pandemic period and its recovery, we believe it is essential that the industry and the Victorian Government work together to keep the building, construction and development industry operating safely with a pipeline of work in place to ensure jobs are secured and businesses remain solvent.

### **3. Industry actions to maintain safe operations**

The building, construction and development industry has demonstrated unprecedented collaboration in working together and alongside the Victorian Government to manage workplace safety to minimise the spread of COVID-19. The joint commitment of employers, unions, industry associations, and workers right across the sector to support the health advice and Chief Health Officer's directives has resulted in us creating our own extensive guidelines which are embedded into safe work practices to ensure absolute diligence and compliance.

Our industry has taken a leadership role in the development of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidelines for the building, construction and development industry which have been adopted and agreed by unions and industry associations and endorsed by the Building Industry Consultative Council. The guidelines are also overseen by WorkSafe, DHHS and the Victorian Building Authority.

These Guidelines are at the forefront of helping us to manage worksites and workplace safety, and they continue to be updated and rolled out across building, construction and development sites. The working group the collaborative approach, has enabled fast deployment of critical site management measures such as temperature testing, site entry procedures and wearing of masks.

Open dialogue and collaboration continue between unions, industry associations and government stakeholders including Worksafe and DHHS. We are collaboratively providing input to the Victorian Government's Building and Construction Industry COVID-19 Taskforce (Rapid Industry Group), and our organisations and businesses are working closely with the Industry Liaison Officer to strengthen and support the efforts of DHHS in contact tracing, workplace mapping and building site management in instances where a case of COVID-19 is identified.

Since the initial development of the Guidelines in March 2020 (now at Revision 5.1) several proactive initiatives have been introduced in the building, construction and development industry aimed at preventing the introduction and/or spread of COVI-19 on sites. These initially included:

- Declarations signed by all workers on entry
- Staggering of start/finish time, crib and meal breaks to reduce congestion
- Limiting the number of workers travelling in hoists and lifts on multistorey towers
- Marking out 1.5 metre spots in waiting areas, foyers and work locations
- Reducing table occupancy in crib rooms
- Increasing site ablutions to enable spacing out of wash and change areas
- Substantial regime of cleaning and disinfecting of meal rooms, ablutions and common areas and touch points, such as handrails, light switches etc.

Progressively and proactively, the building, construction and development industry has also introduced:

- Compulsory temperature test screening of workers on entry
- Compulsory wearing of face masks when unable to physically distance (since 23 July, compulsory always, unless exempted – as directed by DHHS)
- Comprehensive workplace mapping methods to rapidly identify and isolate from site, any potential close or casual contacts of confirmed positive cases.
- A substantial education program of the importance of these measures has been rolled out to over 600 health and safety representatives across the entire disciplines of the industry, i.e. building workers, civil workers, metal workers, electricians, plumbers and service technicians.
- Random onsite asymptomatic testing of workers is undertaken by the industry's own Health Service provider – INCOLINK, supported by its medical partner Australian Prostate Centre.
- Over 12,000 onsite tests of workers have been conducted at 150 worksites, with only 4 positive results being revealed. The Incolink team has been able to respond the next day to sites where a worker has been tested positive (from community transmissions).

#### **4. Building, construction and development industry COVID-19 data**

As a result of this focussed effort, we can report:

- Positive cases of COVID-19 on construction sites remain very low in comparison to the overall cases in the Victorian community.
- While overall cases in Victoria are still increasing, cases identified in the construction industry have remained low throughout the pandemic.
- Construction workers appear to account for only 0.02% of people who have tested positive for COVID-19 to date.
- Construction employees are more than five times **less likely** to contract COVID-19 than the total Victorian population.
- To date, a total of 34 construction sites have reported employees known to have contracted COVID-19, and only four sites appear to have experienced on-site transmission.
- Across these sites, to the extent that it has been able to be confirmed, it would appear that total construction site positive cases are 48, with less than 28% thought to be from close contact on site and the remainder originating from community transmission.

***The apparent lack of transmission of cases that has been found on sites further demonstrates the effectiveness of measures taken across the building, construction and development industry to prevent transmission.***

Our collaborative group of building, construction and development industry associations and unions will continue to work with the Victorian Government to identify and consider further measures to protect and manage workplaces and enable ongoing safe operations throughout the various phases of this pandemic.

## 5. Our request to the Victorian Government

We will continue to assist the Victorian Government to maintain the building and construction industry as essential work and identify further innovative ways to support its ongoing safe operations.

We accept that the circumstances can change rapidly and without warning. However, we are very confident that the building, construction and development industry can meet the challenges that confront us, and we always appreciate the level of consultation afforded to us.

As we have stated previously, before any directives are made, we request that building, construction and development industry associations, unions and key stakeholders be jointly consulted to minimise impacts and duration and enable planning to occur.

## 6. Participating unions and industry associations

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	<i>Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU)</i>	<i>251 Queensberry Street Carlton VIC 3053 Phone: (03) 9230 5700 Email: amwu@amwu.org.au</i>
	<i>Air Conditioning &amp; Mechanical Contractors' Association (AMCA)</i>	<i>30 Cromwell Street Burwood VIC 3125 Phone: (03) 8831 2800 Email: shannon.thomas@amca.com.au</i>
	<i>The Australian Workers' Union</i>	<i>685 Spencer Street West Melbourne VIC 3003 Phone: (03) 8327 0827 ben.davis@awu.net.au</i>
	<i>Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU)</i>	<i>540 Elizabeth Street Melbourne VIC 3000 Phone: (03) 9341 3444 Email: vicqueries@cfmeu.org</i>
	<i>Civil Contractors Federation (CCF)</i>	<i>9 Business Park Drive Notting Hill VIC 3168 Phone: (03) 9588 7600 Email: ccfvic@ccfvic.com.au</i>
	<i>Electrical Trades Union (ETU)</i>	<i>Level 1/200 Arden Street North Melbourne VIC 3051 Phone: (03) 8329 0000 Email: etu@etuvic.com.au</i>
	<i>Master Builders Victoria (MBV)</i>	<i>332 Albert Street East Melbourne VIC 3002 Phone: (03) 9411 4555 Email: ceo@mbav.com.au</i>



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