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Considerations for Reopening Following the COVID-19 Pandemic

Code Department Operations

May 1, 2020

While code departments continue to address the immediate needs posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, some cities and states are beginning to plan for reopening. Just as code departments continued to provide valuable community functions during the pandemic, their effective operations will be essential during reopening. This includes both the operation of the code department itself and supporting the safe reopening of buildings in the community.

To support our members at this time, the International Code Council has compiled important considerations and potential solutions code departments should think about as they plan for opening up their doors to the public.

The content presented here is general in nature, code departments know their local conditions and are aware of state specific requirements including stay-in-place orders, interpretations, and waiver procedures. Code Council chapters and building associations can be important sources of local information. The Code Council has also assembled resources on its [Coronavirus Response Center](#).

As we continue to navigate these unprecedented times, it is important to always abide by the recommendations of local health officials, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and other national and international health authorities.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RESUMING OPERATIONS

- Engage constituents frequently for feedback on department plans.
- Communicate with stakeholders frequently to smooth the reopening process. This includes messages on the department's website and email communication to industry groups and Code Council Chapters.
- Communicate departmental needs and the essential services provided by the department to the city, county and/or state representatives responsible for formulating government-wide reopening policies.
- Review and reevaluate all measures for code department staff to ensure that their safety can be maintained. Train all staff on these measures and procure personal protective gear as necessary.
- Establish clear guidelines for in-person interactions between code department staff and the public as they return. Set expectations and new procedures for stakeholders and communicate them clearly.
- Identify whether facility changes are needed for areas where public interactions occur including installation of "sneeze guards" or other barriers and markers on the floor or other signage for social distancing.
- Evaluate all code enforcement activities that were conducted during remote operations. Ensure that all financial transactions are properly documented, records are appropriately filed, and corrections are completed. Where necessary, determine if follow-up inspections are needed.
- Determine whether any requirements are needed for previously vacant job sites that are resuming construction.
- Be prepared for the possibility that the virus may return if a vaccine is not widely available yet. This period before re-emergence provides a good opportunity to refine plans and conduct after action assessments.

PERSONNEL AND THE WORKPLACE

During the pandemic, many departments altered their employee policies to allow continued operations and to protect the health and safety of their employees and the public. Variations of these policies based on lessons learned, efficiencies gained, and ongoing health and safety needs may be implemented upon reopening. Changes should be documented and communicated to employees. In some instances, these policies may be dictated by the jurisdiction. Be sure to share any department specific needs or lessons learned with officials setting such policies. Relevant personnel policies include:

- Social distancing expectations including the use of personal protection equipment
- Remote work procedures (including equipment needs and computer network security)
- Sick leave and health requirements
- Preparations for future remote operation periods (what materials to take/leave, advance planning etc.)
- Travel and training policies

For workplace protection engage in risk-based decision-making that includes understanding, planning for, and classifying worker exposure risk to COVID-19 in the workplace according to [Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(OSHA\) Guidelines](#). Understand and plan for potential cross-contamination across the built environment including work activities performed in office-based, remote telework, and field-based environments.

Implement a combination of individual and workplace preventive measures to limit the potential spread of COVID-19 in the built environment. Consult resources including:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [individual guidance on preventing the spread of COVID-19](#)
- [OSHA Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#)
- [Society for Human Resources Management \(SHRM\) Navigating COVID-19 Resources](#)

OFFICE/FACILITIES

Buildings that house and serve code departments are typically not different than other buildings in the community. Consult the document [Considerations for Resuming Operations Following the COVID-19 Pandemic: Building Operations and the Role of the Code Department](#) for specific information.

DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- Review policies and practices implemented due to COVID-19 to determine successes and challenges and which should be continued or evolved to support efficient operations moving forward. These include electronic submission of permits and virtual inspection practices.
- Explore opportunities to digitize forms and scan existing paper records to ensure future online access as needed.
- Evaluate IT needs and address software, hardware and communications to ensure adequate resources are in place to support future remote operations if they become necessary.
- Review points of interface with other municipal departments and where necessary establish collaborative procedures and processes for future remote periods of operation.
- Review communications strategies with stakeholders. Where needed, improve or setup methods for clearly communicating with stakeholders using tools such as websites, social media, e-mail blasts, texts, etc.
- Establish clear state and local lines of communication to allow any future guidelines and restrictions to be quickly and clearly received and implemented.
- Identify the tools and equipment used by multiple employees. To the extent practical assure that each user has their own. Where not possible, establish plans for cleaning and disinfecting of frequently used tools and equipment on a regular basis.

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