



NH Departments of Public Work & COVID 19

Special Resource Document from UNH T2 (rev. 3/27/2020)

The COVID-19 virus has disrupted activities across the country and around the world. Highway and Public Works Departments need to figure out how to adjust activities as first responders, while keeping employees and citizens safe. Recent [executive orders](#) from Governor Sununu ask non-essential businesses not currently teleworking to close physical locations temporarily, and all residents to stay at home (per guidance and with exceptions). The Governor provided [guidance on essential services](#) that shall continue to operate with necessary staff to complete critical work requirements in support of COVID-19 or essential state and local business. Local governments and other essential businesses have been encouraged to reduce the number of workers in the workplace for essential work. The President recently issued updated Coronavirus Guidance for America. This updated guidance speaks to Critical Infrastructure Work, to help State and Local officials as they work to protect their communities, while ensuring continuity of functions critical to public health and safety, as well as economic and national security.

Essential Work: The transportation infrastructure is essential for both public safety and commercial visibility. Ask yourself, what do you really need to keep doing in order to serve the public? Many communities are continuing implementation of their capital programs as an essential government function and will continue to construct capital projects. The “response to COVID-19 is directly dependent upon a reliable transportation system.” Snow plowing, filling potholes, cutting down unsafe trees, and keeping water and sewer services operational are clearly critical and, in some cases, explicitly listed. However, there are many activities that could be postponed if needed due to supply or manpower issues. If you can delay something until summer you may need to do so, but not at the expense of being prepared and ready for an emergency regarding your roads and streets. Keep your equipment maintained. Here is a list of items that should NOT be delayed:

Essential Services

- Water & Sewer Operations
- Snow Plowing and Weather Emergencies
- Repairs of failed systems including culverts, traffic lights, traffic signs
- Building cleaning and maintenance

Probably Essential

- Filling potholes
- Maintaining equipment
- Replacing signs and other worn out safety systems
- Cutting trees and brush related to safety

If you are not sure if your work is essential, ask yourself the following questions:

1. If the work isn't done, will critical infrastructure (e.g., utilities, roads, & streets) be placed in jeopardy?
2. What is needed to make sure health and safety workers can get out and do their jobs?
3. Is this work needed to be ready for an emergency weather event?

If you answered yes to any of those questions, you may want to go ahead and keep doing those activities.

Staying Safe on the Job: At work and elsewhere, you should use best practices with regards to social distancing and cleanliness. Having your crew work in shifts, work every other week, or work 2 days on and 2 days off (except during emergencies) may be warranted. Some departments are going to 1/3 on 2/3 off. Different types of shift and work patterns may be more applicable for your particular department. Set up the minimum crew size to be safe.

Recommend employees refrain from going out in public for breaks or lunches. Limit access to vendors or outside visits from the public.

Ask yourself what you would do if one of your employees comes down with COVID-19 since those employees (and the ones working with those employees) would need to be quarantined for two weeks or more. Set up your operations to account for the possibility of staffing disruptions.

Other commonsense changes include requiring workers to not all take breaks at the same time, splitting up your crews, driving separately to any job site, limiting who is working in the building together, and being sure to clean and disinfect any surfaces and equipment. You may want to assign only one person to a particular vehicle during this time and use a single loader operator for filling trucks during snow events. If not, be sure to have the vehicle cleaned between use and try to let the equipment sit overnight after cleaning.

Of course, the overall key is limiting exposure. Here are some additional items to think about as you modify your operations:

- Social distancing of all employees of at least 6 to 10 feet
- Stay home if you are sick, even if it is not COVID-19
- Have office personnel work from home
- Clean your hands often and avoid touching surfaces with bare hands
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- Cover coughs and sneezes
- Wear a face mask if you are sick and you have to work
- Clean and disinfect more often than you think you need to
- No public access to buildings or property without an appointment AND essential need

Partnering with your neighbors:

As things progress you or your neighbors may be in difficult situations with employees out sick. Activate your emergency plans and decide who can help cover if your crews are not available. Make sure you have agreements for shared services in place. Don't worry about trying to have a face-to-face meeting. Meet via phone and keep good notes. This is allowed in the emergency declarations. We will get through this together.

At UNH T2, we have partnerships with several different statewide associations because they help us just as they can help you, including NH Public Works Association (NHPWA), NH Public Works Mutual Aid (NHPWMA), NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), NH Road Agents Association (NHRAA), NH Municipal Association (NHMA) and others. You can access additional information on any of these professional public works organizations on our website at <https://t2.unh.edu/affiliate-groups>. Communicate with the public works or road agents' associations and keep in touch with us to let us know how we can best support your teams and communities during this time.

We've prepared a special resource section on our website to share information on COVID-19, including for government and public officials. <https://t2.unh.edu/policies-standard-operating-procedures#collapse-1-3>

Sources: US Dept. of Homeland Security- Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers Memorandum and [Cornell Local Roads Program \(NY LTAP\)](#). Prepared for UNH T2 by Scott Kinmond.