



On the cover

Frequent handwashing is one of many controls implemented at the Molson Coors Fraser Valley Brewery. Molson is one of many employers that have been working hard to prevent B.C.'s workforce from contracting COVID-19.

Putting the COVID-19 safety plan in place

By Gord Woodward

Staying in business has taken on a new meaning since the pandemic emergency measures started in March. Putting a COVID-19 safety plan in place has helped these businesses keep B.C.'s workers safe.

Many B.C. employers have helped “flatten the curve” during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their success has been in implementing a COVID-19 safety plan specific to their worksite — one that takes into account the existing Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, policy from the *Workers Compensation Act*, and directions from the provincial health officer and Ministry of Health.

To reduce the risk of disease, they've adapted work procedures and created new ones: A contractor uses QR codes to generate health questionnaires on smartphones, for example; a brewery sends workers home with care packages to protect their families and reduce the chance of exposure.

Many employers also teamed with workers, WorkSafeBC, and industry associations to develop new risk assessments. They emphasized physical distancing and sanitization procedures tweaked to each workplace's unique needs.

The key to making it all work is keeping conversations on health and safety open and collaborative, says WorkSafeBC occupational safety officer Dean Lailey,

based in Nelson. He's been working with business owners to discuss their plans for safe operation during COVID-19.

“Owners, prime contractors, and workers need to be flexible,” says Lailey. “Employers need to recognize the stress many workers are experiencing. Workers need to recognize that new procedures and controls may be implemented to ensure their safety. Everyone needs to work together to find workable solutions to what undoubtedly will be unique situations.”

Here's how six employers have stayed ahead of the curve by ensuring a healthy and safe workplace:

Construction: Residential and commercial

Report your health with a QR code and a smartphone

In Vancouver, Edmonton, and Calgary, General contractor Clark Builders reacted to COVID-19 as soon as the first cases were confirmed in Canada in early March. “We tried to jump ahead of the curve,” explains senior superintendent Wayne Macleod, based in Vancouver. “It's not hard to implement a plan. And once you've got it going, it takes care of itself.”

The early start paid off. “We haven't lost a sick day,” he says of the 40-person crew excavating and forming for a residential and commercial development in Maple Ridge.

To enter the site, workers scan a QR code with their smartphones to bring up a health questionnaire. If they list any symptoms, “an alert comes on my computer and we go out and check on our people.”

The team is also holding project orientation outdoors rather than in the site trailer and is monitoring physical distancing. Wash stations and washroom trailers with hot water allow for frequent hand washing.

Personal protective equipment is also abundant. “Everybody has to wear gloves, even myself — a rule that is part of our regular personal protective equipment process. And we supply the N95 mask to anyone who needs it,” Macleod says — including workers not on the Clark payroll. “We just want the work to continue and everyone to work safely.”

The company also equipped first aid attendants with full face shields.



Signage reminds customers to stay distant from one another at Otter Co-op.



A pre-lift meeting between WorkSafeBC, Clark Builders, Bigfoot Crane, and RKM Cranes shows social distancing in action.

High-contact items like tools and door knobs are disinfected four times a day. And COVID-19 signage includes pictograms to help overcome language barriers for workers who speak little English.

Macleod says he used WorkSafeBC as a resource when dealing with the changing dynamics of the pandemic. “I really appreciate the advice and openness,” he says.

Jacqueline Spain, a WorkSafeBC occupational safety officer, says it’s the commitment from senior management that particularly helped Clark build a comprehensive COVID-19 prevention program. “They all believe in what’s going on there and trying to provide a safe workplace so workers want to be there,” she says.

Construction: Tower cranes

When physical distancing isn’t possible

Like many employers in construction, Ryan Burton oversees more than one workplace. The managing director of Abbotsford-based Bigfoot Crane Company has 12 staff at the office and 18 who visit various jobsites to erect and dismantle tower cranes. So Bigfoot’s COVID-19 response has had to take into account very different scenarios.

Reducing risk for office staff was straightforward. Right from the beginning, “anybody who absolutely didn’t have to be here worked from home,” says Burton. Anyone needing to visit — from customers to delivery trucks — has to call ahead and maintain physical distance. The Health Canada COVID-19 app, which includes a questionnaire for health screening, has been downloaded onto all company phones. Sanitizer and disinfectant are widely available.

Reducing risk for crane crews was trickier. “Our employees have to work in close quarters,” says Burton. “We couldn’t maintain physical distance while erecting or dismantling tower cranes.”

To solve the problem, he turned to the British Columbia Association for Crane Safety, which he chairs. The association worked with its members to develop COVID-19 guidelines.

One of the requirements calls for a construction site to be shut down before crane workers arrive. “That way we had no risk of any of the other trades contaminating our work area,” Burton says.

His crews wear N95 masks, gloves, and safety glasses. They use fresh coveralls each day, bagging the used



At a Clark Construction worksite, a trailer washroom with hot water access replaces portable toilets that typically only have hand sanitizer.

ones at the end of each shift for washing. Fresh washrooms are brought in specifically for the crane crew. And they sanitize their tools daily.

Bigfoot also saw a need for mental health assistance. Working during the pandemic can cause anxiety, he notes. “There’s a lot of reassuring, calming nerves, being supportive,” Burton says. “We have also arranged some counselling.”

“We pulled resources from WorkSafeBC and they’ve been supporting us on site, attending pre-job meetings. They’ve been explaining the risks.”

Heavy construction

Planning proves value even before work starts

Preparing for COVID-19 helped Gord Zaitsoff land a contract. And a detailed health and safety plan for operations during the pandemic allowed him to finish the three-week project “right on schedule with no interruptions,” says Zaitsoff.

The owner of G. Zaitsoff Holdings Co. Ltd. in Castlegar was prime contractor for a drainage holding spill pond project that began in March. “I think one of the reasons I was able to secure the project was because I provided a detailed outline of how we were going to do the job, covering all the concerns about COVID-19,” he says.

With twelve crew and nine pieces of equipment on site, Zaitsoff had to carefully coordinate their movements. He contacted WorkSafeBC to review his plan. “They’re a great resource,” he says. “If you’re unsure of anything, just ask them questions.”

Zaitsoff emphasized the importance of physical distancing and sanitizing. “We covered that every single day for three weeks in our morning toolbox safety meetings,” he recalls.

To keep people at a safe distance, workers travelled to and from the worksite by themselves. Vehicles and heavy equipment were parked well apart. There was no sharing of the big machines either. “We made sure the operator was dedicated to one piece of equipment.”

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—Dean Lailey, occupational safety officer, WorkSafeBC

Eliminating a common lunchroom, staging area, and site trailer further reduced the risk of workers being too close together.

Sanitizer and wipes were placed in the heavy equipment. Tools were wiped down daily. So were the portable washrooms, including the door handles and slide lock. These measures will continue in future projects for Zaitsoff.

The key to the plan’s success? “Buy-in and input by all on site,” Zaitsoff says.

Forestry: Log harvesting and transport

Travelling in separate vehicles reduces risk of exposure

Maintaining physical distance on the job can be easier for some forestry operators because workers are usually spread out. Problems could crop up, though, when getting crews to the site in the first place.

“The biggest challenge is our transportation,” says Norm Powers, owner of Log Specific Contracting, a “stump to dump” firm based in Chemainus on Vancouver Island. Before COVID-19, crews travelled to and from work together. Now? “I have separate pickups,” he explains.

One person per vehicle is one option to reduce exposure to the virus, says Ron Judd, a supervisor with WorkSafeBC’s Prevention Services. When people have to travel in the same vehicle, employers are using other controls, such as putting plastic barriers up between passengers or “in a crew cab, they’ll have one person sit in the driver’s seat and one sit on the far side in the back,” he says.

Judd advises workers to take an added precaution when travelling in the same vehicle can’t be avoided:

“Always try to sit in the same seat and go in the same door so you’re not cross-contaminating.”

Even though many sites dedicate heavy equipment to one operator, there’s a risk of contamination there too. “Our biggest concern is the surfaces that we touch,” says Norm’s wife, Barb, who drafted the company’s COVID-19 safety plan by using WorkSafeBC’s website. Each machine and truck has a disinfectant spray bottle and shop towels “so everybody can wipe down their points of contact.”

For a wash station, Log Specific uses a five-pound water jug, a pump soap container, and paper towels. Hand washing instructions printed from the Centre for Disease Control website are attached to the jug. The company also provides gloves and cap shields, a new face shield that clips onto a hard hat or visor.

Norm Powers says he emphasizes COVID-19 protocols during safety meetings. “I still keep bringing up



To enter a Clark Builders worksite, workers scan a QR code with their smartphones to bring up a health questionnaire. The focus is to get help for anyone with symptoms and encourage quarantine.

reminders so that we're all on the same page. People's mindset and their attitude — that's a big challenge. You can't become complacent."

Service: Real estate

The safety net of Personal Optional Protection

When the provincial government designated real estate agents as an essential service during the COVID-19 pandemic, Langley real estate agent Pamela Omelianiec knew she needed a plan. Her work involves office staff, potential buyers, sellers, and home inspectors.

She prepared her company's COVID-19 safety plan — and found some additional protection.

To create her plan, Omelianiec accessed many of the resources outlined on [worksafebc.com](https://www.worksafebc.com). While researching, she also discovered Personal Optional Protection, which provides workplace disability insurance for eligible self-employed people. "I'm thrilled with that," she says. "POP coverage gives me a little bit of peace of mind."

Her safety plan details how her Horn Real Estate team implements public health and WorkSafeBC protocols. Open houses were banned but personal interaction can't be, Omelianiec says. "This is a relationship business," she explains. It's also a regulated one. Real estate agents have to, for example, verify buyer ID

in person and submit a report to a regulatory body. And paperwork requires signatures. "I do have clients who are not comfortable with digital signing."

Her first step was to assemble a kit of personal protective equipment: gloves, surgical masks, and sanitizer. She uses them for client meetings and offers them to clients too.

Omelianiec screens anyone who wants to view a home. Pre-qualified buyers can do a tour but can't bring anyone with them. They travel in their own vehicle. They answer a health questionnaire and confirm how they are feeling before entering the home.

A sign at the entrance emphasizes physical distancing and asks customers to avoid using high-touch items such as doors and light switches. The real estate agent is available to open any doors and cupboards with sanitized hands or gloves. "We recommend that the buyers keep their hands in their pockets," she says. Washrooms are off-limits. Omelianiec sanitizes the door handle, house key, and lockbox when leaving.

For home inspections, owners are asked to provide unobstructed access to areas such as the electrical panel and attic. Inspectors fill out pre-screening forms and ideally work alone. When done, they also wipe door handles and light switches and properly dispose of gloves, masks, and wipes.

Retail: Grocery

New safe work procedures enhance plexiglass effectiveness

Like hand sanitizer and disinfectant, plexiglass has become a prominent tool in protecting retail workers at the checkout counter. As an engineering control, the transparent barriers help shield cashiers from the transmission of potential droplets exhaled by customers.

Otter Co-op took it a step further. The Langley-based retailer — it operates grocery, pharmacy, feed, and liquor stores as well as gas bars — also implemented new safe work procedures for cashiers at the stores selling non-food goods. As an administrative control, cashiers are able to scan products through the plexiglass while customers hold the items up. Workers don't touch any items.

"We limited the handling of the product, which we hope will help prevent the spread," explains Harj



Limiting the amount of customers who can be in the store, gives staff the space restock at Otter Co-op.

A barrier at Otter Co-op eliminates the need for product handling. Customers hold the products up to be scanned.



Sahota, director of safety and asset protection for Otter Co-op.

He followed WorkSafeBC protocols to craft Otter's COVID-19 safety plan. "Right at the beginning we completed a risk assessment using the hierarchy of controls," he says. He also reviewed the resource [Guidance to retail food and grocery stores](#) prepared by the B.C. Centre for Disease Control. "It was a great resource. It had a lot of crucial information."

Door handles, cash registers, computers, tables, and other high-touch areas are disinfected throughout the day. Staff sanitize the store frequently. Greeters at high-traffic stores, and announcements on public address systems, remind customers of COVID-19 safety protocols such as physical distancing and following floor arrows while moving through aisles.

Communication with staff is vital, Sahota says. Safety information is shared through the company website, newsletter, and email. Refresher training emphasizes cleaning, hand washing, and food preparation safety. Cleaning supplies are restocked frequently. And everyone on staff pitches in.

"At one point, our CEO even hand-delivered hand sanitizer and disinfectant on a Sunday because a location reached out to say they were running very low," Sahota says.

Manufacturing: Brewery

Creating a cross-functional group to assess and manage risks

Fast action and constant communication kept two of three production lines running at Molson Coors Fraser Valley Brewery in Chilliwack during the worst of the COVID-19 outbreak in March and April. One line — beer kegs — shut down only because demand disappeared when pubs and bars closed.

"We kept up with our bottles and can lines," Hema Chidambaram, the company's environmental, health and safety manager, says proudly.

The brewery began implementing its COVID-19 continuity plan in early March. "Our number one priority was to look at areas where we could eliminate public gatherings," says Chidambaram. Public tours,



Anyone coming to the Molson Coors Fraser Valley Brewery — including employees — undergoes temperature screening and a health questionnaire before entering.

the gym, and the on-site pub were closed. All meetings were moved online.

“The next plan was to look through job categories to see if people could do their work from home.” As a result, 50 percent of the workforce was able to work remotely.

After implementing physical distancing, workers on site were given masks and face shields for any tasks that needed to be done in close proximity.

The company also sent their workers home with care packages containing sanitizer and masks. “We need to protect their family,” Chidambaram explains.

All departments had a hand in handling issues such as sourcing personal protective equipment, reviewing the protocols, and helping to approve the disinfectant sprays and hand sanitizers for production floors. “You don’t want to contaminate your beer with the disinfectant you’re using,” she points out.

Today, anyone coming to the plant — including employees — undergoes a temperature screening before entering. Temperature screenings are not a mandatory control, but Chidambaram notes that the tests have helped identify a few people who had mild symptoms and allowed them to go home and rest. Hand washing is emphasized. Separate washrooms are dedicated to truck drivers who make deliveries.

A COVID-19 committee meets daily online to share information. “It’s a cross-functional group, with employees, management, and people on the floor,” Chidambaram says.

So far, all the planning and implementation has been a success — the brewery had zero confirmed COVID-19 cases — because management and workers collaborated. “Think like an employer when writing your program. Think like a supervisor when implementing the program and think like an employee to know the difficulties and challenges they will face,” she advises. ☺

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