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From temperature checks to colored wristbands, builders share best practices for safe construction during pandemic

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Workers start arriving at the construction site of Austin Independent School District's new Doss Elementary School at around 5:30 a.m. each day.

As interior buildout has started and multiple parts of the two-story building off Far West Boulevard and MoPac Expressway are being constructed at once, the number of workers on the site is at its peak — about 130 to 150 on any given day, said [Jay Klein](#), project superintendent for Bartlett Cocke General Contractors.

Before workers can walk through the chain-link fence to begin their day, they first have to fill out a basic health survey accessed by scanning with their phone a QR code attached to that same fence. The regularly updated survey asks workers if they have been in close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 in the last 14 days and whether they have experienced cold or flu-like symptoms in the last seven days. The form also prompts workers to adhere to specific handwashing guidelines and lets them know that entering the job site is voluntary.

Workers then must visit the office at the job site so supervisors can make sure they don't look sick and understand the current safety requirements. This brief meeting also allows workers to ask any questions they may have. Before leaving the office, workers are outfitted with a wristband — a different color each day — that clearly shows they have passed the day's screening process.

Klein said the use of the wristbands makes workers accountable.

This is one of the best practices that have emerged among construction companies during the pandemic as the city of Austin and other agencies implement health and safety requirements as part of shelter-in-place orders. The city's [extended order](#), which went into effect late April 13, places extra requirements on the construction industry.

About three weeks ago, [Danny Rothe](#), senior business analyst at Bartlett Cocke, developed a questionnaire through Microsoft Forms that was accessible by scanning a QR code at job sites. The answers populate a spreadsheet accessible by superintendents at each of Bartlett Cocke's eight sites in the Austin area. Superintendents only have access to their particular job site.

Workers being able to fill out the questionnaire on their phones rather than on paper — maybe even before they leave their vehicle — makes the process faster and safer, he said. It eliminates the use of paper and pencils or iPads, which would have to be regularly cleaned.

If a worker answers yes to any of the questions on the survey that could make them more likely to contract coronavirus, Klein or the supervisors at that particular job site are notified. The superintendent can then call that worker and remove them from the site if necessary.

"It tracks every day," Klein said. "It is all in a spreadsheet from the first day we implemented it. We can see what day that person has been on the job, what days they haven't and why they weren't here on this day. It helps because they are asking follow up questions in the event we have the reason to believe there is an issue. It gives us data we can use to help protect everybody."



BARTLETT COCKE GENERAL CONTRACTORS

Jose Ramos, assistant superintendent at Bartlett Cocke General Contractors Doss Elementary construction site (center), stands near the entrance to the site. In the background, a worker is scanning her phone to access a daily health survey.

Klein said the response to the survey from workers has been overwhelmingly positive. The vast majority are thankful for the extra step to make sure the job site is safe.

Other helpful tips

Several construction firms in the Austin area have implemented their own enhanced safety protocols and best practices.

DPR Construction uses an infrared thermometer to check workers temperature before entering job sites, said [Bryan Kent](#), business unit lead for DPR's Austin office.

DPR also designed portable handwashing stations for its job sites, he said. The sanitation stations were designed to be adaptable to follow the flow of work on construction sites.

Ahead of the city's updated shelter-in-place order, DPR had implemented strategic shift scheduling to allow for social distancing and personnel on site monitoring and enforcing guidelines from the city and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Workers at the Foundry II construction site on the east side were also wearing masks ahead of the updated order, said developer [Bobby Dillard](#), co-founder of [Cielo Property Group](#). Workers fill out a daily health survey on an iPad outside the job site.

At Rogers-O'Brien Construction job sites, a thermal temperature screening process is being conducted by third-party medics, according to the Dallas-based company. The company has an internal microsite where it can communicate and share updates with workers including weekly video updates related to COVID-19.

Last week's video was a "Day in the Life" captured by Amador Alvarez, Rogers-O'Brien's regional safety director for Austin/San Antonio. In the video, he walks through the different stages of a mixed-use tower under construction near Rainey and Red River streets, formerly known as [The Quincy](#), and reviews the new health and safety protocols in place.

[JE Dunn Construction](#) has also implemented temperature screening for all workers on its job sites and staggered start times for trade partners "to better manage the flow of people while maintaining productivity," said Chris Szeliga, senior vice president and Austin office leader. "We even hired a third party to bring medically trained personnel to each of our projects in order to assist with the temperature reading and screening process.

"While strong health and safety policies are making a difference, we're also relying on people to do the right thing and hold each other accountable during this crisis. JE Dunn has been collaborating with many of our peers and the AGC to share best practices and explore innovative solutions that can keep our job sites safe. It's been amazing to see our industry come together in pursuit of a common goal during these uncertain times."

The city of Austin added to its construction requirements in an updated order on April 13. Among the new requirements are:

- Workers must wear face coverings in addition to maintaining six feet of separation from others
- Staggered shifts for sites with more than 10 active workers
- Daily briefings reiterating COVID-19 safety requirements and personal protective equipment check
- Mandated handwashing with handwashing stations and restroom facility placement at least six feet apart
- Provision of single-use disposable paper towels and no-touch trash receptacles
- Designation of a COVID-19 Safety Monitor

To access the city of Austin's updated order click [here](#). For other resources provided by the city, click [here](#).

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