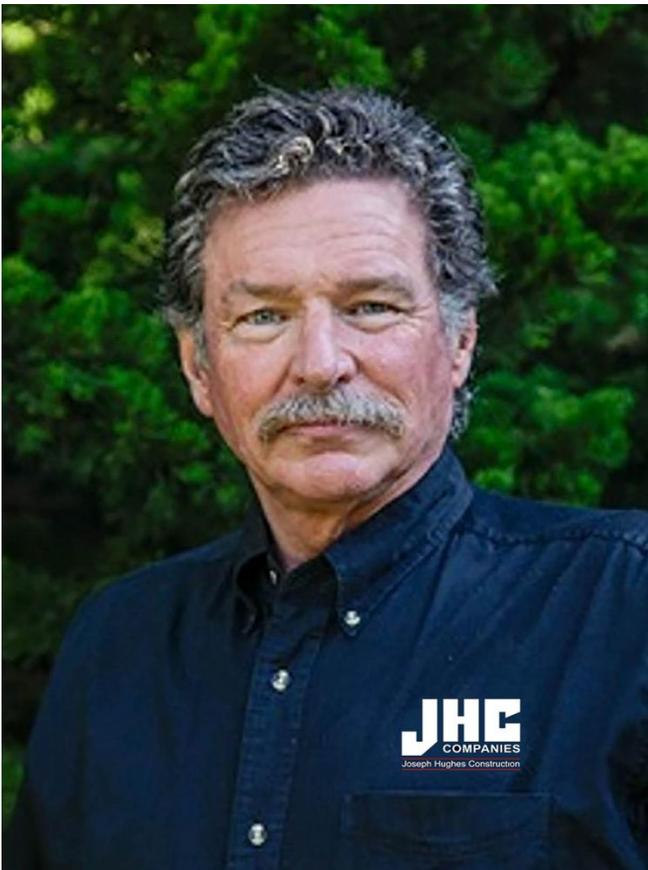


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INDUSTRIES & TOPICS

Viewpoint: Working together to keep construction sites safe during Covid-19



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By Joe Hughes – President, Joseph Hughes Construction
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Covid-19 has caused a lot of uncertainty for many people, but one thing that is certain is the increased need for safety and protection for our colleagues and our employees on our active job sites.

As the pandemic reached the Pacific Northwest, we had a jarring realization that we needed to change the way we do much of our business and change it quickly. We raced to find hand sanitizer and, like most others, found only empty shelves in the stores, so we turned to North Portland's Shine Distillery. This is just one of many lessons in how to adapt to Covid-19 that we have learned over the last several weeks.

Starting in March, at Gov. Kate Brown's initial recommendation, we began requiring our employees to wear masks and gloves on our job sites. We drafted Covid-19 exposure prevention and response protocols that were written to comply with Washington's stringent standards. Though most of our projects are in Portland, we requested a review of our protocols from a Vancouver building inspector because Washington's standards for construction sites during the pandemic are stricter.

We've installed extensive social distancing and PPE signage on our job sites, and our workers wear full personal protective equipment that includes high-visibility, social distancing clothing. We've also implemented a new procedure with a screening checklist broken into four parts and 16 separate Covid-related topics that our superintendent addresses daily and throughout each shift.

This checklist includes training our leaders on how to spot and prevent the spread of infection and implementing reliable systems to disseminate real-time public health communication to workers. As an example, during our daily safety meetings we check the temperature of each worker and conduct a verbal roll call. People attending the meetings do not share pens, paperwork, or other items.

We also screen our subcontractors and, in one case, learned that one had potentially been exposed to Covid-19 by his daughter, who tested positive for the coronavirus two days after their visit. We immediately shut the job site down and hired a local certified company to sanitize it. Within 90 minutes of shutting down, we had every employee who worked on the site tested. We did not reopen the site until each test had come back negative, and I'm happy to report that the subcontractor who was potentially exposed also tested negative.

In addition to ensuring that each job site is safe and clean, careful planning and communication facilitates social distancing on job sites where close proximity is likely. These new rules have had some impact on production, but it hasn't been significant. Decades ago, when OSHA rules were new, we thought safety regulations would ruin productivity and profits forever. The Industry adjusted, learned, and improved overall. Like OSHA regulations, this is a new way to work. We will all learn and adapt, the new behaviors will become second nature and life in all segments of the economy, not just construction, will continue.

Our office staff are working remotely from home and doing a fantastic job of keeping up with the work while adjusting to kids, spouses, and dogs in their workspace. Our four

senior managers working in the office are required to log their temperatures and fill out a questionnaire daily. Zoom meetings, emails and phone calls are keeping our family culture intact.

I am immensely proud that our entire JHC Team has embraced these changes and enthusiastically supported each other in keeping our projects, our staff, co-workers, and customers as safe as we can.

We hope the lessons we have learned while navigating the Covid-19 pandemic can be helpful for others. We are optimistically moving forward with all our projects and have been pleased to see that, despite some delays in production, most of our subcontractors, our employees and our clients are extremely understanding.

Within our company, we are very thankful to be working in Oregon and fortunate that everyone is staying healthy because of their awareness of these new protocols.

Joseph Hughes Construction was established in 1981 and is based in Southwest Portland. It is currently building 17 projects including Scott Edwards Architecture's new office building on East Burnside, Pacific Plaza at SE 82nd Avenue and Division Street and the new Rotary Youth Center at Morrison on Northeast Sandy Boulevard.