

Construction industry remains robust during hard times

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by Richard Lyall - 17 Nov 2020



The health and safety of workers is, and remains, the most important concern of the [Residential Construction Council of Ontario](#) (RESCON).

When COVID-19 hit, RESCON was quick out of the gate in developing and implementing protocols to keep workers protected on construction sites. As a result, we were able to keep working safely and efficiently through the pandemic, and continue to do so today.

We are able to carry on, in large part, because the provincial government brought in an order to allow our industry to work 24 hours a day, seven days a week, on new hospital builds, expansions, and other essential projects like COVID-19-assessment centres.

The provincial order was announced by government back in the spring and expires Oct. 7, 2021. It allows work to proceed on all construction sites, including new housing projects in the residential sector, from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.

This is important for a couple of reasons: the provincial order has enabled the construction industry to protect the health and safety of employees, and it's accelerated the builds of essential and important projects.

The extended hours give worksite managers more flexibility to stagger workers' shifts and take reasonable precautions to keep them safe during the pandemic. This means there are fewer on-site workers at any given time.

Although much of the work is done outdoors, workers often come into contact with one other at bottlenecks on construction sites, like hoists. Having fewer workers on site will simply result in fewer contacts.

The provincial order is a big reason that our industry has been able to move forward, and while it allows work to start earlier and finish later, builders remain cognizant of the community and try to limit noise. For example, they do less noisy work in the early morning and late evening hours.

There have been calls by some municipal councilors in Ottawa and Toronto for the province to roll back its order and return control of noise bylaws back to municipalities. Any such move, however, would pose a safety concern and put more workers on construction sites at risk. It would also slow the construction of many much-needed projects and set the industry back at a time when the work and jobs are most needed.

The construction industry is a key driver of the economy, employing roughly 400,000 workers on sites across Ontario.

Any attempt to roll back hours for construction would be a disaster—on both the health and safety and jobs fronts. We have managed to keep workers safe during the pandemic while allowing them to work and support their families.

This pandemic isn't over by any stretch of the imagination. The consensus is that COVID-19 will be with us for some time to come. The number of active cases provincewide remains high, and some areas are still above dangerous levels.

Changing the rules at this stage would be disastrous. Contractors must have the tools to keep their workers safe.

The proactive measures that our industry has taken during the pandemic have been successful, and we must stay the course. There is no need to change something that's working.