

Coronavirus impact on the building and construction industry

The coronavirus health threat is a fast-evolving situation which is likely to affect the West Australian building and construction industry in the months ahead. Master Builders is assisting members to be prepared by offering information and support.

Work health and safety

Employers are required to provide a working environment in which workers are not exposed to health risks, as far as possible.

Appropriate actions may include:

- Checking official Government sources for current information and advice
- Reviewing and promoting policies and measures for infection control. Remind staff about the need to ensure good personal hygiene and encourage regular hand washing
- Ensuring workers are aware of the isolation/quarantine periods in accordance with advice from the Australian Government Department of Health. This includes information on when staff should not attend work and actions they should take if they become unwell or think they may have the symptoms of coronavirus such as fever, cough or sore throat.
- Eliminating or minimising international work travel, in line with the travel advice on the Australian Government's [Smartraveller](#) website
- Providing regular updates to workers about the situation and any changes to policies or procedures as well as information on relevant support services.
- Contingency planning to manage staff absences.

WorkSafe has supplied information on preparing for coronavirus [here](#). Coronavirus information from the Australian Government Department of Health is [here](#) and the WA Department of health [here](#). The World Health Organisation also has online updates [here](#).

Supply of building products

There are likely to be shortages of building products from China and delays in delivery. There have been reports of shortages of some imported glass and paint products. Supply chains have been disrupted and delayed by the Chinese government's measures to contain the spread of the virus and some continuing travel bans within the country may slow the return of factory workforces and production to full capacity. We have no definite information about the likely length of delays in delivery to Australia or when they will occur, but there is concern they could last for some months depending on the product.

The lack of information is undermining confidence and making it difficult for businesses to make decisions. Master Builders has requested that the Federal Government use its resources to obtain as much concrete information as possible and make it available to industry as quickly as possible.

The combination of the coronavirus threat and recent bushfires across Australia may also put pressure on supplies of protective masks, such as the P2 workplace safety mask which is important for those exposed to dangers such as asbestos particles or silica dust on site.

Contracts

A key issue of concern is contract terms regarding project delays in this situation. Master Builders believes all parties to a contract should take a sensible approach given the circumstances and not be legally opportunistic. Master Builders members have access to our legal advice line and more information is in the legal section of the Master Builders WA website. We have raised this issue with the Federal Government and State Government's Building Management and Works, recommending they take the lead with government contracts and ask that the private sector follow suit.

Workplace issues

COVID-19 is likely to present challenges for businesses regarding workplace safety and industrial relations. Due to the fast-changing nature of the situation and possible sensitivity of individual cases, Master Builders recommends members contact our industrial relations team for guidance.

The Department of Mines Industry Regulation and Safety has labour relations information on employment affected by COVID-19 [here](#). The Department of Health is offering coronavirus resources for industry [here](#). Master Builders Australia has recommended the Federal Government urgently establish a website with relevant information.