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# Keeping Up with Construction During a Pandemic

The last year has been challenging for everyone and has forced us to adapt to the reality of new procedures relating to mitigating the spread of COVID-19. The construction industry is no different. Although most condominium construction and repair projects were able to continue through the stay-at-home orders and restrictions, the industry has been forced to adapt. All change is hard, but in some ways the changes helped to improve collaboration and communication on construction projects.

The pandemic forced some structural changes to construction projects to reflect the COVID-19 protocols. In large part, these new protocols required additional planning upfront and improved communication between the contractor, property manager, and residents. Fortunately, there are multiple resources that provide guidance for developing, implementing, and managing these new protocols. A few resources you should be aware of if your condominium is proceeding with a construction project during the COVID-19 emergency:

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## Province of Ontario

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/develop-your-covid-19-workplace-safety-plan>

The “Workplace Safety Plan” document should be used during the planning stages of the project to develop a clear plan for screening, risk mitigation, and outline procedures for managing any active COVID-19 cases. Once completed and agreed upon, this document can be included in the project documents or posted on site (digitally or hard copy) so residents are aware of the protocols and procedures put in place. It is also worthwhile to revisit this plan during the project to make any necessary adjustments and as a reminder to maintain the agreed protocols.

## Canadian Construction Association

<https://www.cca-acc.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CCA-COVID-19-Standardized-Protocols-for-All-Canadian-Construction-Sites-05-26-20.pdf>

The “COVID-19 Standardized Protocols for All Canadian Construction Sites” document is a bit more prescriptive and provides best practices for workplace and safety procedures for construction projects. This document details the recommended practices for communication, cleaning, contact tracing, and screening, among others. We recommend reviewing this with the contractor during the planning stages to ensure these practices are being implemented and will be incorporated into the project plan.

## Ministry of Labour

<https://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/index.php>

To confirm if your planned project is considered essential, we recommend contacting the Ministry of Labour for the most up-to-date information.

## City of Toronto

<https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-what-you-should-do/covid-19-orders-directives-by-laws/>

We have used the City of Toronto as an example because they have been fairly active in providing guidance and mandates on the requirements for reporting COVID-19 outbreaks; however, a number of cities and municipalities have provided similar guidance and mandates.

The City of Toronto has mandated that any workplace that is aware of two people who test positive for COVID-19 in a 14-day period must notify Toronto Public Health. The City provides additional information to clarify this mandate. Further, the Medical Officer of Health has recently issued the Section 22 Order. The order gives Toronto Public Health additional capacity to investigate and react to workplace outbreaks. The most stringent requirement they can place on a workplace is a full closure. There are alternatives including partial closures, and dismissed shifts or team. The order also requires the workplace to post signage provided by Toronto Public Health.

## Recent Project Experiences

In early 2020, RDH Building Science

Inc. had a number of capital projects planned for our condominium clients. When the first stay-at-home order was put in place, our projects were immediately put on hold. During the holding period, we were able to assess which projects were considered essential and work with the contractor, property manager, and Condominium Board to develop a plan to proceed where allowed.

This was one change we saw during pandemic: increased collaboration. In many ways, we have always promoted a collaborative, team approach to construction projects by emphasizing that all parties are working towards a common goal: a successful project. The possibility of delayed projects impacted each party, with the contractor facing lost revenue and the Board and property manager being forced to continue managing components at the end of their service life (i.e. leaks, poor operation, and hazards).

We collaborated to mitigate the risks of delaying a project, aligning each party’s goal to see the project proceed safely and successfully. Through increased collaboration we were able to develop creative solutions to keep the projects moving forward while still working within the budget, schedule, and COVID protocols. Understanding the residents, their needs, and their concerns, helped to inform these project implementation decisions.

Ultimately the decision to proceed came down to safety: we could proceed with the work while still providing a safe environment for the residents and project

*Figure 1 Photos from the air sealing project where compartmentalization was used effectively. Photo credit: RDH Building Science Inc.*

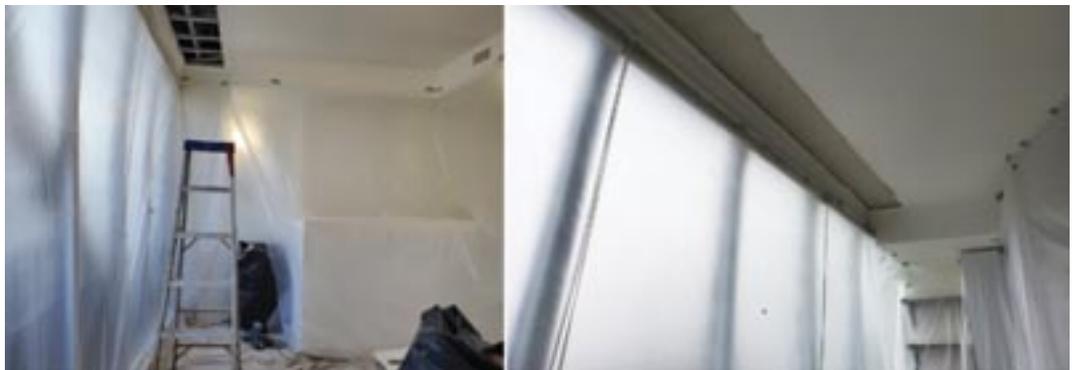




Figure 2 Scaffolding erected to enable the roof replacement project to proceed during the summer. Photo credit: RDH Building Science Inc.

team (contractors, engineers, property managers, etc.).

### Case Study: Interior Air Sealing Project

RDH had an air sealing and insulation repair project planned for a mid-rise condominium with condensation and water penetration issues that had been ongoing since original construction over 10 years ago.

To conduct the repairs, the contractor had to enter each individual suite. This presented a unique challenge, especially considering the challenges with physical distancing and exposure risks in interior spaces. Further, a number of the residents were working from home during the stay-at-home orders. During the planning stages of the project and in collaboration with the contractor, the team decided that using a compartmentalization strategy was the best approach for this project. Procedures included the following:

- The contractor assigned a dedicated crew that worked at the building for the duration of the project.
- The crew filled out a daily screening questionnaire prior to suite entry.
- The contractor set up a plastic enclosure around the work area (along the windows) that was sealed to the ceiling and floor. When possible, the windows within the enclosed work area were opened to provide fresh air. The

crew conducted a thorough cleaning of the enclosed area at the start and end of each day.

- To further mitigate exposure risks, the workflow was adjusted so that the contractor worked on one suite at a time. The repairs were fully completed in one suite before moving on to the next suite, to avoid having work proceeding in multiple suites at one time which could lead to cross-contamination and contact tracing headaches. This workflow impacted the schedule, and there were some lost efficiencies; however, with collaboration from all parties the project was able to proceed with a relatively minor schedule extension.

### Case Study: Roofing Replacement

We had a roof replacement project planned for a townhouse condominium with some serious water penetration issues. The water penetration issues had progressed to the point of rotting some components of the wood structure. As a result, there was no interest in postponing the project and it was considered essential to proceed.

The roof being replaced was also the rooftop terrace and only accessible from within the suite. To avoid entering the suites, scaffolding was built at each end of a townhouse block. This allowed the project to proceed and achieved signifi-

cant efficiencies as the roofing work could proceed at multiple suites instead of the original plan which was to complete one suite at a time.

### Conclusion

The past year has made it clear that construction and rehabilitation projects can proceed in this current environment. Safety should remain the top priority which cannot be stressed enough; however, proceeding safely is possible with enough planning and willingness to adapt. As noted and outlined in the documents referenced above, there are some structural and procedural changes required to keep projects moving forward but with collaboration and some creative thinking this is entirely possible.

We recommend reviewing the websites and documents listed above if you are considering a construction or rehabilitation project this summer. Following the recommended procedures and protocols outlined in these documents will provide a strong foundation and set the right tone for your project.

We are looking forward to another safe summer and are looking forward to continue making buildings better.

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