

Doing business in the COVID age: Concrete Washout Systems keeps employees and others safe with mandated protocols

New York Construction Report Special Feature

The impact of COVID-19 on lives, communities, and the global economy is unparalleled in modern times. When we think back on 2020, the pandemic will resonate as a defining and historic moment, one that shaped future attitudes and behaviors, including workplace safety measures.

Although much of the economy was shuttered to help slow the spread of the virus, some services deemed essential remained open and in business, including Concrete Washout Systems (CWS) located in Paterson, New Jersey, and serving customers across that state, New York, and Pennsylvania.

The company continued to deliver its services, providing an environmentally friendly method of removing and disposing of residue and contaminants most commonly created by washing down equipment at construction sites, like concrete trucks, pumps, mixers, chutes, hand tools and wheelbarrows.

The system involves a portable, self-contained and watertight roll-off bin that controls, captures and contains concrete washout material and runoff, making it easy to clean concrete trucks, pumps and equipment onsite and recycle concrete materi-



als and wastewater. The system is deployed by some of the largest residential and commercial builders in the country.

CWS' work keeps the associated runoff from entering storm sewers and contaminating the ground, an essential environmental service. Just as essential, says the company's president and owner, is adhering to COVID-related safety rules and protocols to keep employees, customers, and the general public safe. Doing so is an essential part of doing business in the COVID age.

"Safety starts with our supervisors, employees learn by example. If they don't see them practicing good safety habits, they won't think safety is important," says Patricia Haftek. "There's a saying that's even more relevant in these time: 'Safety doesn't happen by accident.' Safety means keeping yourself and others free from harm or danger by being careful with what you are doing."

That means equipping employees with face shields, masks, gloves, sanitizing wipes, paper towels, and

mandating their use. Crews also take extra precaution in cleaning their equipment before a shift and after each use, and also do a job-site audit to determine where employees are touching shared surfaces and making sure those surfaces are disinfected regularly throughout the day.

Audits involve drivers reviewing a site to see how close contact with others can be avoided, and ensuring proper personal protective equipment (PPE) is worn at all times. It's about vigilance as much as it is about following the rules.

"We recognize the responsibility we have to our employees, business partners, and clients. Drivers are advised to avoid any part of a job site where proper safety and PPE protocols are not being followed. They know the Company will fully support them if a customer cannot be serviced due to unsafe job-site conditions," says Haftek.

In New York City, where CWS is active, essential work during the COVID-19 crisis was limited to af-





It's also about getting buy-in from employees, and leadership from supervisors, that these measures will keep them and their families safe while they go about doing a job that has been deemed essential. As the economy continues to reopen, CWS is showing how business, while not as usual, can still be conducted if the proper safety protocols are followed.

"It's about due diligence at the job site. Proper sanitation and PPE protocols are easy to implement when employees handle their job in a professional manner."

fordable housing, homeless shelters, hospitals and other healthcare facilities, schools and utility work. Recycling and waste disposal were also considered essential, and CWS continued working at numerous sites, including the Javits Center, Astoria Power Plant, PANYNJ projects, NYC DOT projects, and numerous Con Edison, school and housing sites.

Guidelines say people should keep six feet or more away from each other, to minimize the risk of infection. The company didn't wait for safety measures to be mandated. Rather, it took steps to ensure all employees had personal protective equipment and followed the safety protocols.

It's not just job sites that the pandemic has impacted, but office interactions as well. To limit exposure, meetings are usually done by phone, although the CWS office does remain open with limited staff.

Doing business in the age of COVID-19 is more difficult than usual, but not impossible, says Haftek. COVID-19, she continues, has put a spotlight on the importance of worker health and safety, and American contractors responded by implementing new job-site policies such as staggered shifts, employee temperature checks and top-to-bottom disinfection of job sites, tools and machinery.

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