



PLUMBERS LOCAL 75

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COVID Crisis Plumbers 75 Member Update

April 2, 2020

Brothers and Sisters,

In our state and across America the confirmed Coronavirus cases and fatalities are still on the rise. In our jurisdiction the health care facilities are bracing themselves for a potential spike in Coronavirus patients in the coming weeks.

Our signatory contractors are reporting plenty of work available. A few projects have been paused or shut down due to Coronavirus related clean – up or improvements. Most of our members are working steady with some slow-down in service and remodeling. We are not aware of any Plumbers Union Local 75 members confirmed positive for the Coronavirus as of April 2, 2020.

Over the last month our family lifestyles have been drastically altered. Normal is a memory. Fear, stress and paranoia are being bolstered by an invisible and indiscriminate force of nature. Many people and families have the added stress and uncertainty due to being out of work due to their place of business being ordered to shut down or cut down services. Essential service providers are also experiencing high stress and anxiety due to shortages in PPE and sanitation facilities in their workplaces. Most of us as Americans are not accustomed to or ever experienced shortages of everyday items and amenities or the right to peacefully assemble even in church.

Public Health and Safety have become of the highest priority in our global and local society. Jobsite sanitation and worker safety and sanitation are being emphasized and/or enhanced. General contractors, sub – contractors and project owners are facing shortages in availability and supply of adequate PPE and human sanitation items. Jobsite worker social distancing is a new challenge that requires cooperation, coordination and common courtesy between contractors and workers across all trades on the job.

On Tuesday, Governor Evers participated in a conference call with several Wisconsin general contractors, the AGC and some WI building trade union leaders. The general contractors expressed their appreciation for Governor Evers commitment to the construction industry and the state's robust biennium capital budget. The Contractors and Union Reps on the call discussed the importance of keeping our trades workers safe with practical social distancing and access to human sanitation and handwashing on the jobsites. We also discussed enhancing communication between contractors, workers and their Local Unions about health and safety issues and concerns that are ongoing and/or arise as the pandemic and our work progress.

On the call the Governor shared his insight and expressed his appreciation of the effort and commitment of essential businesses and workers during this pandemic. He also stated his commitment

Business Manager
Steve Breitlow



to the construction industry as essential to public health and safety and our state's economic stability. Governor Evers recognizes that essential service providers safely working through this pandemic will help shorten the overall economic recovery for our state and nation. It is critical that we and other essential service providers perform our jobs safely to prevent spread through our workplaces, homes and communities. It was encouraging to hear government and industry leaders express their commitment to public and worker safety and hygiene on the jobsite. There are efforts and businesses starting and/or ramping up production of PPE and sanitation supplies. These efforts are commendable and will be in a race against the progression of the pandemic.

It is in the best interest of the construction industry, the public and our state's economy that we do as much as possible with the resources, tools and equipment we have by taking every precaution possible to slow the spread of the pandemic on jobsites. It is up to every individual on jobsites to protect themselves and their fellow co-workers and/or customer in our workplaces. Everyone on that call agreed that we need to work together to protect our public by protecting each other and to communicate unsafe issues and concerns that exist or when they arise. It is vital to public and worker health and safety that unsafe conditions are communicated and resolved. We are urging the development of some industry wide protocols to communicate and address unsafe jobsite conditions related to the potential spread of the Coronavirus. We are proposing that the protocols include communication with the impacted employers, their contractor association, the affiliated trade union, the general contractor or construction manager and the AGC. Involving and communicating as an industry is the best way to keep our members working with pay and benefits and to keep our industry from sliding into another recession.

There are new governmental orders and economic relief packages and protections being introduced every day. These government orders and relief packages and protections are complicated, confusing and evolving. Many of these orders and economic relief proposals are coming from the federal government and will have to be approved by each state legislature. They apply differently in each state and not every worker and/or employer is eligible to provide and/or benefit from each of these government orders relief packages. We have been getting calls on how the federal and state economic stimulus and relief funding apply to our members. Government promised and provided financial aid and benefits are outside of our collective bargaining agreements and are authorized and distributed through the relevant government agency. These financial aid and relief packages have many variables regarding eligibility, allocation level and timing. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act is intended to provide paid leave to workers impacted by COVID – 19. The FFCRA applies to certain employers with less than 500 employees. Small businesses with less than 50 employees can be exempt from the ACT. The FFCRA paid leave does not include health or retirement benefits. The CARES Act was signed into law on March 27, 2020 and includes incentives for states to increase unemployment benefit and waive the 1 week waiting period. WI DWD is updating their system to raise the UI by \$600 per week. The Governor is urging the WI State Legislature into session and to approve waiving the 1 week wait period in line with the Federal CARES Act. As union representatives we have no authority to pursue these benefits, we will do our best to provide access to information about these resources for our members.

The Coronavirus Pandemic is creating global public health and economic fear and uncertainty. No one knows when the pandemic will subside. No one knows if it will resurge again and if so for how long and how many times. We will never know how effective or ineffective what we did or didn't do mattered or will matter to the spread of the pandemic. We only know that what we have done to date was likely too little, too late and what we are doing now under government order is better than what normal was a month ago. No one knows the duration of or depth of the impact of this pandemic on our public health

and economy. What we do know now is that we are essential service providers and that our employers have a year or more of work on their books. If we can work safely and efficiently through this period on a day to day basis without adding to the spread, we will soften the impact of this crisis on our members and our families. The way we approach the next 30 days on our jobsites will likely have a dramatic impact on whether we will be working on jobsites in May, June and into the future. Each of us has to do our part to protect ourselves and each other as much as possible. If you are aware of an unsafe jobsite situation, please go to safe place and communicate the concern to your supervisor, contractor and one of our business agents. If we become part of the problem, we will likely cease to be an essential service. More diseases were prevented through quality plumbing than medicine. We are charged with protecting the health of the nation and that includes each other. For more information, check our Plumbers 75 website.

Be smart and be safe,

Steve Breitlow

These links are also found on our website:

<https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/covid19/public/ui.htm>

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/pandemic/ffcra-employee-paid-leave>