

To: Board of Directors
From: John Berge, General Manager
Date: 05/14/2020
Subject: COVID-19 and Soft-Reopening

BACKGROUND:

According to federal, state, and local public health experts, the peak of infections and deaths related to COVID-19 will occur today, May 14 in our area. This is based on limited information, however – nominal testing, nominal contact tracing, and very limited knowledge about the impacts of climate on the transmission of the virus. With these things in mind, it is very possible that the “peak” could be extended to later in the spring or summer. It is further contemplated that the “re-opening” of the economy that began on May 4 may increase the chances of a resurgence of infections and deaths in the fall.

The Governor’s Executive Order on Open Meetings Act allowing political subdivisions to operate public meetings electronically or telephonically expires on May 31, and there has been no word about extending or refreshing the spirit of the order.

With these things in mind, it is still responsible for us to think about how we go about “re-opening” in the near term. The purpose of this memo is to outline a guide to a “soft re-opening” for June, though this date can be changed or extended as warranted.

OUTLINE:

Given that we may need to “re-open” sooner than we had anticipated, it is my belief that we need to reverse our actions when we “shut-down.”

1. Revert to staggered schedules for employees that NEED to be in the office to perform their functions. This will ensure that there are no more than 10 individuals in the office at any one time, allowing for social distancing. Employees that report for duty will be required to have cloth masks for use and must have hand sanitizer at their desks that they use liberally. Staggered work schedules will be developed and administered by the department heads.
2. Employees that can perform their duties remotely should continue to do so to keep our total number of employees in the building to 10 or less.
3. Building entry will be less restricted. Visitors may enter the building without an appointment, though appointments will be encouraged – particularly for tree deliveries and seed-drill pick-up. Those that enter the building will be required to wear a mask. Meetings with visitors must be held in the Education Room or the Board Room to comply with social distancing guidelines.
4. It is likely that we will continue in the short-term without a receptionist, and as such, the automated phone system that forwards calls from our desk to our mobile phones if we are working out of the office will remain in place, and voicemails can also now be retrieved remotely.

5. In the event that the June Board Meeting is held in-person, we will require that Board members sit at least six feet apart, they wear masks, and members of the public wear masks – we have ordered 5 layer cloth masks for the Board and have disposable masks for the public. We will then disinfect the Board Room at the completion of the Board meeting – particularly those areas that are high-touch – light switches, doorknobs, etc.

The Governor's Order for Directed Health Measures remains in effect:

1. Stay at home when you are sick. If you have COVID-19 symptoms that may include fever, cough, or shortness of breath, you need to contact your healthcare provider. Do this BEFORE going to the doctor to limit exposure.
2. No gatherings of more than 10 people.
3. Limit close contact with others (about 6 feet).
4. Isolate from others that are sick.
5. Wash hands and/or use hand sanitizer often.

Our Guidance from 3/31/2020 remains in effect:

IN THE EVENT OF A SHELTER-IN-PLACE ORDER

ESSENTIAL EMPLOYEES:

I am working with Barb, Danielle, Todd and Scott to determine who of those that are still routinely coming to the office or are working in the field remain essential in the event of a shelter-in-place order, if and when the time comes that such an order is issued in our home county or statewide. Those that still need to report for duty either in the office or in a District vehicle include the following:

1. Either Barb or John will be in the office (likely on a rolling basis) to ensure that decisions that need to be made, documents signed, etc. can continue.
2. The entire water department will continue to function as their roles are essential to the delivery of our services, particularly in the spring and summer months leading up to irrigation and chemigation.
3. The entire tree department will continue to function as their roles are essential to the delivery of our services, including tree sales, and spring plantings.

NOTE: While these individuals are functioning, they may not be present in the office for any significant period of time during the workday. In the event of a shelter-in-place order, those employees would take their work vehicles to their homes (we have verified insurance will not be impacted) and operate out of their homes as needed.

4. A designated member of the administrative team (likely on a rolling basis) will report to the office for clerical duties (issuing of invoices, issuing of checks, completing monthly accounting and treasurers reports and payroll).
5. Jenifer will continue to staff the greenhouse as required for irrigation and harvest of produce. In her absence, Barb or her designee will fill that function.

NOTE: ALL other staff are essential to our operations as well, but their duties can be performed remotely from their homes.

EXPOSURES/POSTIVE TEST

In the event that one of our colleague's tests positive for COVID-19, we will all be required to self-quarantine for 14 days. Our office will need to be deep cleaned. We are reaching out to vendors to be put on a standby list if this happens.

If you develop symptoms of COVID-19 or believe you have been exposed to someone who may have COVID-19, you should immediately contact your supervisor and follow the additional guidance below regarding quarantining, contacting your healthcare provider or the Panhandle Public Health District.

MASK GUIDELINES/PPE

The CDC has recommended that everyone have a modicum of personal protective equipment to include a face covering (mask, bandana, handkerchief) and gloves for their outings whether related to work or not.

MENTAL/EMOTIONAL HEALTH

It is important for us all to remember, that the uncertainty that each of us face personally and collectively can take a toll on our mental and emotional wellbeing. It is important for us to recognize that each of us plays a special role in each other's lives, and as such we should look out for each other, be kind to each other and lend a listening ear to our co-workers. You are also reminded that our Employee Assistance Program is still active and offers some helpful resources for a whole host of issues. <https://www.theeap.com/totalcare-eap>

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCES

To self-report you should call the Panhandle Public Health District at (308) 262-5764 or the Scotts Bluff County Health Department at (308) 630-1580. If you have any additional questions, please feel free to ask me, or call either one of these entities.

1. What if I think I have been exposed?

If you think you have been exposed to COVID-19 and develop a fever or other symptoms such as cough or difficulty breathing, call your healthcare provider for medical advice.

Symptoms:

Fever

Cough

Shortness of breath

If you develop emergency warning signs for COVID-19 get medical attention immediately. Emergency warning signs include:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion or inability to arouse
- Bluish lips or face

This list is not all inclusive, so you should consult your medical provider for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning.

2. How can I avoid exposure?

- **The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus.**
- The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person.
 - Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
 - Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
- These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.

3. I'm sick, what do I do now?

- **Stay home:** Most people with COVID-19 have mild illness and are able to recover at home without medical care. Do not leave your home, except to get medical care. Do not visit public areas.
- **Stay in touch with your doctor.** Call before you get medical care. Be sure to get care if you have trouble breathing, or have any other emergency warning signs, or if you think it is an emergency.
- **Stay away from others:** As much as possible, you stay away from others. You should stay in a specific "sick room" if possible, and away from other people in your home. Use a separate bathroom, if available.
- **Call ahead:** Many medical visits for routine care are being postponed or done by phone or telemedicine.
- If you have a medical appointment that cannot be postponed, call your doctor's office, and tell them you have or may have COVID-19. This will help the office protect themselves and other patients.
- **If you are sick:** You should wear a facemask, if available, when you are around other people (including before you enter a healthcare provider's office).
- **If you are caring for others:** If the person who is sick is not able to wear a facemask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), then as their caregiver, you should wear a facemask when in the same room with them. Visitors, other than caregivers, are not recommended.

4. Further recommendations to stay well:

- **Cover:** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.

- **Dispose:** Throw used tissues in a lined trash can.
- **Wash hands:** Immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Clean your hands often

- **Wash hands:** Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. This is especially important after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing, going to the bathroom, and before eating or preparing food.
- **Hand sanitizer:** If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry.
- **Soap and water:** Soap and water are the best option, especially if hands are visibly dirty.
- **Avoid touching:** Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

Avoid sharing personal household items

- **Do not share:** Do not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people in your home.
- **Wash thoroughly after use:** After using these items, wash them thoroughly with soap and water or put in the dishwasher.

Clean all “high-touch” surfaces everyday

- **Clean and disinfect:** Routinely clean high-touch surfaces in your “sick room” and bathroom. Let someone else clean and disinfect surfaces in common areas, but not your bedroom and bathroom.
 - If a caregiver or other person needs to clean and disinfect a sick person’s bedroom or bathroom, they should do so on an as-needed basis. The caregiver/other person should wear a mask and wait as long as possible after the sick person has used the bathroom.
 - High-touch surfaces include phones, remote controls, counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables.
- **Clean and disinfect areas that may have blood, stool, or body fluids on them.**
- **Household cleaners and disinfectants:** Clean the area or item with soap and water or another detergent if it is dirty. Then, use a household disinfectant.
 - Be sure to follow the instructions on the label to ensure safe and effective use of the product. Many products recommend keeping the surface wet for several minutes to ensure germs are killed. Many also recommend precautions such as wearing gloves and making sure you have good ventilation during use of the product.

Again, these changes may not come to pass in June, but it is prudent to begin to outline our plans for a re-opening.