

COCA details on antigen rapid tests and effects on trade contractors

The government of Ontario has secured a massive supply of antigen rapid tests that it wants to make available at no charge to workplaces in order to control the spread of the virus and keep workers safe

- The tests will primarily be used in the types of workplaces where there have been significant outbreaks or that pose the risk of significant outbreaks such as long-term care homes, manufacturing plants, food processing facilities, schools etc.
- The antigen rapid test is not a diagnostic tool, it is merely a screening tool like the non-contact thermometers that are being used to screen workers at many workplaces
- They are only used for asymptomatic workers, i.e. workers that display no signs of the disease
- Workers who test positive on the antigen rapid test are required to get a PCR test diagnosis. If the PCR test confirms that the worker indeed has COVID19, the worker must quarantine for 14 days
- The provincial government hopes to deploy 400,000 rapid tests in the construction industry. That's enough to test 20,000 workers twice a week for 10 weeks until the vaccine rollout begins to take hold
- The antigen rapid tests are being made available to companies at no charge and on a totally voluntary basis. Companies that agree to deploy the antigen rapid tests must sign a very straight forward contract with the government agreeing to use the tests in the way that's intended. In construction, the company that voluntarily agrees to use the tests is the general contractor (we are also aware that some trade contractors may wish to deploy the antigen rapid tests.)
- The government prefers to deploy the antigen rapid tests in communities with a heavy virus load, on work sites with more than 100 workers and on projects that are closed-in or that have poor ventilation
- The antigen rapid tests have been piloted on a number of large sites in downtown Toronto where the logistics of the testing have been worked-out
- In the pilots, the general contractor has made taking the test a pre-condition to working on the site
- In the pilots, the general contractor has born the cost of hiring health professionals required to administer the tests, which are available from the government at no charge. At one pilot site, the general engaged the services of six nurses to administer the tests throughout the duration of the workday.
- The qualifications for those qualified to administer the tests has been lowered to a health professional, possibly just a first aider, lowering that cost
- However, the trade contractors bear the costs of the time it takes for each worker to down the tools, make their way to the testing location, take the test, wait for the result, return to their workstation and gear up again. It's estimated that this can take more than one hour on a large construction site
- Some trade contractors are asking for the equitable sharing of all costs associated with administering the antigen rapid tests to workers among all parties that benefit while others believe the deployment of antigen rapid tests on construction sites, where the transmission of the virus has been extremely low, is overkill
- The lost productivity costs related to administering antigen rapid tests is just one more of the many unanticipated costs brought on by the pandemic that are being pushed down the construction project pyramid to be born unfairly by trade contractors