



Empire State Forest Products Association

The people behind New York's healthy forests and quality wood products
www.esfpa.org

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Albany Update March 23, 2020

“Essential Business”

We have heard from several members that they did open for business this morning and we have heard nothing about any enforcement efforts or impacts on business operations. To review the latest information on forest and wood product sector “Essential Businesses” see [here](#). The Empire State Development Corporation guidance has not yet been updated but [here](#) is a link to the guidance on the NYS Agriculture and Markets web site.

We also heard today that all “Construction” businesses have been deemed essential. We are trying to track down some updated guidance on this but have not been able to find anything as of this afternoon.

Based on reports from Canada today, all essential businesses will be closing this week. We are hearing but have not confirmed yet that sawmills are not part of the “Essential Businesses” listed in Ontario and Quebec’s manufacturing listings.

In Connecticut we see that all manufacturing is listed as Essential Business see [here](#).

So regional approaches are not necessarily uniform.

Business Assistance

No denying that as non-essential businesses are dealing with mandatory reductions of workforce that there are tremendous impacts on businesses and employees. We have previously reported on assistance available to businesses in New York regarding both tax relief and regulatory relief imposed in Executive Orders.

The Business Council of NYS conducted a webinar on March 20th “The Impacts of Coronavirus Part II” addressing several employee Human Resource requirements and has made that presentation available. The slide deck for the presentation can be found [here](#).

You can also see our March 22nd Alert that outlines regulatory and tax relief for businesses [here](#).

Financial assistance to business to date is largely coming from the U.S. Small Business Assistance agency and you can find out about those programs [here](#).

As we draft this Alert, the U.S. Senate is deliberating a \$2 Trillion federal Stimulus package. We had hoped that package would have been approved today but debates continue as to what will be included. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is monitoring this legislation closely and has a lot of useful information for businesses. You can get to the resources available from the U.S. chamber [here](#).

My Employee has the Virus?

Now that we have status of Essential Businesses, there is an increasing chance that at some point you may have an employee show up to work or reports that they have a family member who has COVID-19. It is best for employers to be prepared in the event that this happens. There are a number of resources available to help you plan for such an incident. Please check out these links to start planning for your situation:

- [U.S. Center for Disease Control](#)
- [U.S. Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [U.S. Occupational Health and Safety Administration](#)

In addition, inform employees how to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Employers should inform and remind employees of everyday precautions that help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Precautions are similar to those applied to avoiding the flu, including:

- washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and/or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer;
- routinely cleaning all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs with disinfectant cleaners;
- avoiding touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands;
- avoiding close contact with people who are sick; and

staying home when you are sick.

Employers should actively facilitate these precautions where appropriate. Employers should provide disinfectant wipes for employees to clean workstations and place alcohol-based hand sanitizer in multiple locations around the workplace.

Tracking COVID Across the US

The Forest Resource Association has prepared a snapshot of what is currently happening around the country relative to COVID-19 essential services and the forest products industry. To view this document, please follow this [link](#).

NYS 2021 Budget

Yes, believe it or not NY is still working on the 2021 State Budget. We have been trying to determine exactly where things are in the Budget, but the Capital has been radio silent for over a week. Governor Cuomo this morning in his briefing said that negotiations are moving forward, and we will have a Budget by April 1 and it will include policy measures. I have some emails out and we have another call tomorrow at noon on Budget matters but here is what we know for now:

- The NYS Comptroller last week issued revised **revenue projections that COVID-19 will add revenue shortfalls between \$-\$7 billion dollars**. That is on top of a \$6 billion deficit agreed a month ago.
- The **federal Stimulus** will affect this shortfall, yet there is still no agreement on what that will include. NY is the most impacted COVID-19 state to date and the Governor is expecting a strong proposal for NY. Let's see what Senator Schumer can deliver.

- **Prevailing Wage** is still being discussed. There may be a Senate and Assembly agreement on it, but the Executive still wants its package. ESFPA has been agreeing with the Executive stance on this.
- **Product Stewardship (EPR)** is likely out and we heard this last week as well.
- **Freshwater Wetlands** amendments we have not heard anything about. Have an email into the Chamber on this and it will likely be discussed tomorrow.
- **Polystyrene Ban** – is still being discussed. ESFPA has taken a position on just monitoring this. We really don't have a horse in this race, but a ban could support paper product markets.
- **Mother Nature Bond Act and EPF** we expect the EPF to be funded at \$300,000 and the Executive still wants that. Environmental NGOs are pushing the Bond Act, but we have not heard if the appetite for indebtedness has changed. Likely to hear more tomorrow.