

The Covid 19 pandemic has caused a lot of stress for dealers. While this is a serious public health problem and an intimidating business problem it is certainly not something we can't get through together. With some good planning, communication, and mutual support we may all get to the other side of this event stronger than when we went in.

Here are the steps Sutter Home and Hearth has taken in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, there are some items for trying to maximize our communication with our customers and employees, and to create some opportunities in this new business landscape.

**The first step was to determine if our business was considered essential.**

We first reviewed Governor Inslee's order and from there we were directed to the "Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers List." We could see listed as essential both "Home Appliance Retailers" and "Workers providing, maintaining and repairing heating, cooling and refrigeration services." Both classification describe our business and, likely, every hearth retailer in the state.

**Great! We're essential. Now what.**

Once we determined we were essential we looked into whether there was anything else we had to do to keep our doors open. It turns out that it's not enough to be essential, you must also do the following:

- Write a social distancing, illness monitoring, and cleaning/sanitizing plan explaining and mandating the following
  - Nominating an employee to be the social distancing and sanitation officer. Their job is to ensure the following items are adhered to.
  - 6 feet of required distance between employees and between employees and customers at all times.
    - This may require adjusting staff levels and/or schedules to meet the 6 feet of separation. We've adjusted schedules to ensure we have a small enough number of employees that we can maintain required distances.
  - Employees may not congregate in groups with each other or with customers.
  - Daily cleaning and disinfecting of all shared surfaces such as desks, counters, computers, phones, door handles, etc. A log must be created and filled out each day to ensure this is done. We made a log for each area of the store (showroom, back offices, breakroom, warehouse, installation department, service department, etc)
  - Daily check in with each employee to ensure that they are not showing symptoms of illness. Specifically, it must be verified that they do not have a temperature and that they do not have respiratory symptoms. If any employee reports either they must be sent home. A log must be created and filled out each day to ensure this is done. We made a log for each department and placed the responsibility on the managers to fill it out with their staff each day.
  - Signs up in the showroom for customers letting them know that social distancing is required while on the premises and that if they are sick they must not enter and to go home.
- Wrote a letter naming each employee as an employee of our business and that our business is deemed essential. This letter is to be carried by the employee at all times in the event that authorities have questions for staff as to why they are working or traveling during the effective times of the order. The letter is written on company letterhead and states the following:

- Name of employee.
  - Their status as an employee of the business.
  - The status of the business as an essential business per the "Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers List" and under which category (home appliance retailer and providing, maintaining, or servicing home heating, cooling, and refrigeration services).
  - The employees need to commute from home to the business and to travel to residences and other project sites to fulfill their essential job duties.
  - Contact information for an officer or owner of the company to verify the employment of the letter holder.
- Registered our business as an essential business with the state of Washington. This will allow us to have official certificates stating our essential status. This is not needed now (as of 3/26/20) but may be very handy later. Please take this final step to help formalize your status and be ready for any future changes.
  - <https://mil.wa.gov/business-re-entry-registration>
- It is also strongly suggested to increase the flexibility of your time off / sick time policies.
  - Allow employees to use vacation time as sick time.
  - Issue more sick time.
  - In our case our employees already accrue PTO which can be used for vacation, sick time, personal time, etc. However, we decided to go one more step and allow any employee to go negative in their PTO up to 40 hours in the event they get sick.
  - A flexible sick time policy will help reassure employees that they can stay home and should stay home if they are sick.
  - If an employee shows any signs of illness they should be sent home immediately. If an employee tells you or a manager that they don't feel well they need to be sent home immediately. All of your employees need to be reminded that they should also self monitor. If they don't feel well, stay home. This can't be stressed enough. Having one employee work sick could require everyone at your business to be quarantined. It won't matter if your essential if none of your employees can leave their homes.

**Now, here are some things that you are not required to do but you should certainly consider doing:**

- Contact all of your customers that have scheduled work with your business. Explain your essential status and that you want them to know that you are cleared, safe, and ready to work for them but if they would like to reschedule their appointment you completely understand. Now's not the time to try to hold onto those appointments if your customer is rightly concerned about Covid-19. Being understanding here will likely result in a reschedule as opposed to a cancellation.
  - We are also offering to wear gloves and masks in our customers home if they prefer. Most of our customers don't take us up on this step but it shows we know what is going on and that we are concerned for them.
- Update your website explaining your Covid-19 response plan and that you are still open as an essential business. Encourage your customers to call or email you to do business. Encourage them to stay home and do business with you from there. Now's the time to start working on those online consultation programs you've had on the back burner. A great resource we've started using is Calendly for setting up online video consultations.
- Send a mass email out to your customer contact list stating the same as the above.
- If you'd like to see Sutter's response to the Covid-19 epidemic you can go to our website at [www.sutterhearth.com](http://www.sutterhearth.com)

Good luck to everyone as we work through this crisis. I sincerely believe we will be stronger on the other side of this event. If anyone would like to discuss any of these items with me please don't hesitate to call me at the shop (206.783.9115) or email me at [dhammer@sutterhearth.com](mailto:dhammer@sutterhearth.com)

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