

The Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS®)

Covid-19 Resource Document

Key Considerations

1. Essential nature of PGMS® members work
 - a. Grounds departments are considered essential for most institutions
2. School/daycare closures
 - a. Public school closures and impacts that has on staffing
3. Equipment
 - a. Shared equipment and contamination
4. Work environment
 - a. Feasibility of “social distancing” and the “non-remote” nature of the work
5. Covid-19 Virus
 - a. Incubation period is long, meaning people are contagious *before* they begin to exhibit symptoms. If one member of the team gets sick, what’s the likelihood of the rest of the team getting sick?

Recommendations

1. Awareness that emergencies evoke anxiety and the importance of exhibiting concern and care for your staff’s wellbeing is paramount.
2. Hold a staff meeting to proactively address the scope of work, discuss important personal safety precautions (hand washing, not touching your face, using sanitizer on equipment, vehicles (door handles, steering wheel, etc.), and coughing into a tissue or your elbow.
 - a. Discuss workload and social distancing (6’ away from others), avoiding handshakes and hugs.
 - b. Can staff have alternating schedules to maintain social distancing? This may also help for staff members who are affected by school closures.
 - c. Can formal staff meetings be moved to a virtual setting or tele-conference?
3. Stakeholder care
 - a. Post signage about your work site about the proactive steps you are taking to help keep people safe and provide alternative ways for people to access grounds services.
4. Planning for “skeleton” staffing
 - a. If this situation continues to worsen and you are forced to limit operations to “essential personnel and mission critical items,” what positions within your area(s) would fall into these categories?
5. Planning for return to normal staffing levels
 - a. When staffing levels are able to return to pre-Covid-19 levels, full staff meeting to build morale and support staff who may have been sick. For employees who do test positive for Covid-19, please work with your institution to determine appropriate quarantine measures.

What PGMS® Members Across the Country are Doing

1. **Insight from a private university:** Provide a dedicated vehicle/rtv/tractor to each staff member so that they will be the only ones to drive it for the foreseeable future. We do need to rent a few to keep a gardener from driving a loader to a garden. We also need to confirm each has

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their very own leaf and garden rake and ask they get no closer than 6 feet of each other when working outside. We are requiring staff to eat in areas that allow for proper social distancing. We've had hand sanitizer in the trucks for weeks now. Overall, our big message to staff is wash your hands and maintain appropriate social distancing levels. We have submitted a 25% staffing plan of bi-weekly mowing only and some round-up in the beds if possible.

- Insight from a public university:** We typically are considered essential and all respond to ice or other weather events, but not for COVID-19. I had a Skeleton crew ready of 8-10 grounds maintenance staff, one arborist, one greenhouse tech, one pest tech (structural), and one irrigator for 425 acres of main campus. In addition, 1 staff person for our 240 acre research campus. These staff would have been considered critical. We have 82 total FTEs.
- Insight from a public university:** The grounds staff are disinfecting surfaces that are commonly touched in vehicles, offices, and tool rooms. We are practicing social distancing as much as possible (crew meetings outdoor, other meetings via phone or computer) as well as the recommended frequent hand washing, cover your cough or sneeze, wearing disposable gloves and changing them frequently. The university is not closed and the library, food establishments, rec centers, research labs, and residence halls remain open. Students will come back to online classes when spring break ends this Tuesday (it was extended by two days to allow instructors to get their classes transitioned to online). The university is setting up open-sided tents to provide gathering spaces for eating. Those who are able to work from home are encouraged (but not mandated) to do so.
- Insight from a hospital complex:** As far as essential – everyone is essential. The grounds crew may not be doing their typical duties should we start to see the impacts of this virus on our area. They may be helping us perform other duties, such as covering the WP operation, or assisting with calls coming in to BOC, or helping direct traffic, etc., etc. My staff is responsible for cleaning our parking garages including elevators and lobbies. We already wipe down inside the cab and buttons, etc. but we may want to also wipe down stairwell hand railings, etc. All with a good disinfectant.
- Insight from a K-12 Grounds Manager:** Grounds is considered essential personnel, with our hours and work schedule staying the same with modification on how we perform our jobs.
Crew adjustments: Morning meeting have been relocated to ensure safe distance for people to meet. Employees have been asked to self-quarantine if they have any symptoms and the district has waived any disciplinary action if an employee has used up their sick leave/personal vacation and have to take time off without pay. Crew members have been assigned vehicles to drive (no sharing), been asked to eat in open areas at least 6' apart and to disinfect all equipment after use.
Crew assignment adjustments: Part of our daily schedule now includes checking athletics properties, ensuring that bar gates and other fenced enclosures are locked and the location is secured to the best of our ability. We are to report any gathering of 10+ people at any outdoor facility, especially if it looks to be led by an adult. We are taking down athletic structures like

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batting cages, shot put cages, and soccer goals and storing them for the fall. We are working with a contractor to pick up 45+ PortaPotties that were for spring sports. We have new litter pick up and sweep routes at bus drop off areas as the school district is providing breakfast and lunch for students. No out-of-district travel is permitted until July for any reason. All trainings have been cancelled. Grounds managers and grounds staff are not able to work remotely and at this time, have not been asked to adjust the work schedule.

Horticultural/Maintenance adjustments for the next two (2) weeks: Hold off on Spring fertilization until we know that essential personnel will not also be sent home for a 15 day quarantine. We've increased mowing height to 3" district-wide to help water use, turf health, and if we end up not mowing for two weeks. We've cut irrigation in half or turned it off on outlying properties. We've stopped field painting. Aeration seeding and top dressing of school play yard areas that have weak or damaged turf to ensure a healthier and safer playing surface once schools reopen. An increase in tree planting and replacements at schools with the lack of vehicles and foot traffic making access and watering easier. Increase in aeration of turf district-wide also both shallow and deep tine. Large irrigation repairs, sidewalk repairs, hard spot surface repairs in traditional heavy pedestrian and vehicle traffic areas. Pre and post emergent weed control in landscape beds at elementary schools that usually had to wait until spring break or after graduation.

Preparing for no school until Fall 2020: Looking at operating budget to both adjust for a possible reduction (to help cover district closure costs) but also the opportunity to complete bigger tasks, like contract tree pruning, playground inspections and replacement, and landscape renovation projects that cannot normally be performed due to site access restrictions because of school season/summer rental use.

Additional information will be posted in the PGMS® member portal under the "Ask A Professional" section in the thread titled "COVID-19." We encourage members to use this resource to ask questions and post what their institutions are doing during the Covid-19 outbreak.

Resources

- b. "Get the Facts on Coronavirus"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kIL5m5XznNY&feature=youtu.be>
- c. "Four Things You Need to Know About Coronavirus"
https://www.idsociety.org/globalassets/idsa/public-health/coronavirus-one-pager-v_6.pdf
- d. CDC Covid-19 Cases in the U.S.
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- e. "Products Approved to Fight Coronavirus"
<https://www.americanchemistry.com/Novel-Coronavirus-Fighting-Products-List.pdf>
- f. "U.S. Department of Homeland Security Advisory Memorandum on Identification of Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers During COVID-19 Response"
https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/CISA_Guidance_on_the_Essential_Critical_Infrastructure_Workforce_Version_2.0_Updated.pdf