

COVID-19 Pandemic

EDA recommends Safety First

Public statement / Brussels, 25th March 2020

- The European Demolition Association, EDA, encourages customers, industry and other stakeholders to suspend operations.
- The principle “Safety first” should prevail in the current scenario.

Pandemic situation

The world faces a unique situation, due to the pandemic scenario created by the COVID-19, also known as Corona Virus. It has evolved quickly to become a major issue, with a direct impact on health, society, economy and many other aspects.

The stage and response to this pandemic are very diverse in Europe. Most European countries have advised specific protective measures, which also apply to our trade, without stopping strategic operations.

In this situation, the European Demolition Association, EDA, issues this public statement addressed to Public Authorities, both at European and national level, to our customers and to our industry, made of associations, specialized contractors, engineering companies and suppliers, all of them directly related with the activities of demolition, decontamination and recycling.

Health and safety

Our industry is not new to seeing white overalls, face protection and respiratory masks, as it is part of our scope and daily operations the decontamination of hazardous substances from buildings or structures.

These hazardous substances (such as silica dust, asbestos, PCB, lead, radioactive materials, ...) require special measures and procedures to protect from them the workers, the environment and the public. This is what is done on regular basis as part of a demolition, decommissioning or even refurbishment operations.

And it is because of our knowledge and understanding of hazardous substances that we would like to share this statement, asking for safety first, for our workers, for their families and everyone around us, the whole society.

As much as EDA, as European organization, and our National Associations, encourage our members (specialized companies) to follow all the recommendations and implement the protective measures proposed by the health authorities, we are encountering issues which we would like to highlight.

Mainly, if the message from the Public Authorities is to stay home and prevent contact with others, they must understand that every demolition, decontamination and recycling job site is by its own nature a shared space between workers of different fields and activities, generally with no boundaries.

Our companies can do their best to protect our workers in their activity but the protection of a job site and its surroundings, to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is very complicated.

Unlike most of the industries, the construction activities, including the ones of our sector, are by its own nature mobile. Most of our workers need to go to the job site every day, travel there, do their work, eat and then come back again to their families, whom probably were at home following the confinement instructions. Even more, due to the location of the job sites, or to the current restrictions on public transport, workers right now often need to share transport means to reach their work center.

Add to these issues the problem of not having access to basic personal protective equipment, to protect our workers, spare parts and consumables, for regular maintenance of equipment, and logistics issues, to transfer materials to other locations for the following operations, and it is utterly difficult to have all the job sites working as they should.

In our view, without being experts on the topic of COVID-19, but following the health advice and recommendations, it seems like maintaining the operations is generating a significant risk to our workers, their families and the society.

Many of our members have initially donated personal protective equipment, such as masks and overalls, to local hospitals, as these are part of their daily means. But we now have the issue of shortage for the personal protective equipment, which creates problems to continue operations in some job sites, or even an ethical conflict in many of our entrepreneurs.

Does it make sense that we use the protective equipment to work on something that can be postponed, while doctors, nurses and people taking care of our elderly do not have these means to protect themselves and others?

Suspend operations

We understand that every job site, every contract and even the rules and regulations in each Member State are different. And we also understand that our industry works on significantly diverse scenarios.

It can be that a demolition or decontamination operation is part of an emergency response process, due to a fire, collapse or other disasters. But for most of the industry, the operations are planned, as one step in a global process to redevelop a building, structure or site.

EDA recommends Safety First, to protect the health of our workers and their families, following the advice of Public Authorities, to prevent the spread of the disease.

Suspending any non-critical operations immediately for an unknown period will have a great impact, in many ways: social, economic, delays, contracts, ... but what is the impact of continuing operations and exposing everyone to the health risk?

It is because of safety that we encourage everyone involved to be open to dialogue, to make special efforts and to prepare for the impact of delaying operations. We kindly ask the construction industry, developers and other customers, who hire our companies, to be open and negotiate new delivery dates, without penalties for this transitional period.

We also encourage the European Commission and the Member States to provide direct support to the employers, so they can suspend operations temporarily, protect their workers and stay alive for the future.

The impact of this pandemic is still unknown, but thousands of companies delaying operations can have a devastating impact on the society. There must be a clear support from Public Authorities, however possible, to allow for a future of our sector and the construction industry..

Support response

The European Demolition industry, represented by EDA, cannot issue this statement without acknowledging the work of all the health professionals, medical doctors, nurses and all the staff working in hospitals or health facilities, to take care of everyone already sick.

We, the thousands of entrepreneurs and workers involved in our trade, from Europe and all parts of the world, would like to thank them for their work, courage and dedication. We would also like to express our gratitude and thank everyone involved in the care of those in need, for risking their own health to help and care for others.

As stated above, many of our members showed their commitment and corporate social responsibility by providing direct support to local communities with donations or direct help. For instance, we have cases where our contractors have provided their dust suppression units to be used with special products for the sanitation of large areas. We are proud of them!

We, as specialized trade with large fleets of equipment, knowledge and expertise, would like to make ourselves also available to the emergency response teams, especially those coordinated by the military or local authorities, in case our logistics or capability can be of help to the society.

Stay alert

As a trade mature and well organized, the specialized companies are at the forefront, dealing with this unique scenario in every country, as it develops. Our National Associations are providing information and support to the companies, sharing the recommendations of Public Authorities and giving updated details to employers and workers.

And the related events are postponed to new dates, including the EDA Annual Convention 2020, which was scheduled to be held in June (at the city of Belgrade, Serbia).

This public statement from EDA is the joint effort of our Board of Directors to communicate with one message and one voice the support to the industry and the advice to keep safety first.

As the work of our industry is, generally, related with the construction process, EDA supports the statement and requests made by the European Construction Industry Federation, FIEC, to the European Commission in support of the construction industry.

About EDA

The European Demolition Association, EDA, is a non-profit organization bringing together the activities of demolition, decontamination and recycling. Founded in 1978, EDA represents the national associations, contractors, engineers and suppliers related to these activities.

For more information, visit:

<https://www.europeandemolition.org/communication/news/information-about-covid-19>

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