



Everyone has the right to
an affordable and healthy
home during and after the
COVID-19 crisis

Pandemic Response Guidance

Protecting All Vulnerable Workers

APRIL 2020

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Protect all workers, especially those that are most vulnerable, during and following the COVID-19 crisis.

This unprecedented moment requires swift action to ensure lasting protections for the most vulnerable communities. The vulnerability of workers is driving an economic crisis that parallels the health crisis. Financial hardships and a lack of access to healthcare during this crisis will deepen the vulnerabilities of many communities. If we want to see change in one sector, we must ensure the change is structural and fosters positive protections for the most vulnerable workers across all sectors. Positive outcomes for energy and energy efficiency workers must be tied to improved outcomes for all workers. We recommend the following for all workers during, and the recovery period following, the crisis:

Sick Leave and Family Leave

Support people at risk of losing their livelihoods, health care, and homes, including vulnerable and low wage workers as well as those impacted by school and child care closures.

Guarantee a minimum of 14 paid sick and family medical leave days for all workers, regardless of sector or business size.

Enforce paid sick day and family medical leave policies, especially for those who are misclassified as contractors and deprived of their right to paid sick leave.

Protect workers who have a right to self-quarantine if they are concerned about exposure to the virus. Workers should be protected from termination without just cause. No worker should be punished because they were quarantined or requested sick leave.

Contractors/Program Implementers

Establish an emergency fund for small contractors--especially those owned or managed by women, minorities, and veterans--to bridge this period of work stoppage so that they can continue to pay their employees and stabilize their businesses.

Enact policies that allow program administrators and state agencies to continue to support providers of water and energy efficiency services in order to maintain employees on payrolls, especially nonprofit organizations that cannot access solutions that rely on an organization's tax status, i.e. tax credits. (These can include partial payment advances for work under contract, timeline extensions, payment for "virtual audits," etc.)

During the stoppage of in-home retrofit work, governments, utilities, and program administrators should provide funding for workforce development programs, using online platforms, that provide access to information about clean energy skills, jobs, and contracts.

Healthcare

All affected workers need a guarantee that they will keep their healthcare during the crisis and any uninsured person should automatically be enrolled in Medicaid, regardless of income or immigration status.

100% paid testing and treatment for COVID-19.

Expand Unemployment Insurance Benefits for workers who lose their jobs due to sickness or the economic downturn because of the national response to the coronavirus.

Underemployment

Create Emergency Support Benefits, distinct from family or sick leave. Emergency Support will cover workers who still retain their jobs but are unable to work or see their hours reduced due to the current crisis or future emergencies. This policy must also cover self-employed workers, gig economy workers, and worker-owners of cooperative businesses

Require businesses that receive federal or state emergency relief funds to apply a portion of those funds to cover lost wage claims due to job loss or reduced hours from their workforce during the emergency or crisis.

States and program administrators should provide funds to employers to support paid online training by employees while onsite work is not possible.

Healthcare, emergency and essential service workers

Require adequate rest breaks and time off for health care and other emergency workers.

Ensure there is clear communications, available in multiple languages, about all new policies and programs.

Dedicate resources to supporting emergency workers with free childcare. Emergency workers could include: emergency services, grocery workers, home-health aids, healthcare workers, janitorial staff, waste management, health equipment manufacturing (respirators, masks, etc), and public transit workers.

Dedicate additional resources to ensure retail, warehousing, distribution, delivery workers are eligible for overtime pay.

Emergency safety standards

Provide personal protective equipment (e.g., N95 face masks, gloves, and face shields as needed) to all health care workers, first responders, nursing home workers and others who may routinely come into contact with COVID19-infected people. This must include training, fit testing, and maintenance to ensure PPE is effective.

Ensure workers are protected from all infectious diseases in the workplace, including COVID-19. Implement science-driven emergency standards for all workers, explicitly acknowledging that certain workers are at elevated risk for COVID-19, establish a clear hierarchy for decision-making, and ensure appropriate PPE for workers.



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