

CRE Groups Ratify Return-To-Work Guidelines As New York City's Phased Reopening Starts

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Commercial real estate groups are mapping out health and safety protocols for construction sites and office buildings as the city takes its first major steps toward reopening Monday.

New York City was the last region of the state to reach the required metrics to start reopening. With hospitalizations sufficiently declining, enough space in the city's intensive care units and adequate contact tracers, Phase 1 was allowed to begin this week.

Nonessential construction, manufacturing and some forms of retail are allowed to start back up, potentially [bringing](#) some 400,000 people back out to work in the city.

"Today we are turning the page on the COVID-19 virus as we reopen New York City — we didn't just flatten the curve, we bent it, and we did it all based on data and facts," Gov. Andrew Cuomo said Monday. "All this progress has been made because of our hard work, and we can't get sloppy now or else we'll see those numbers start to go back up."

Mayor Bill de Blasio [told WPIX Monday](#) that Phase 2 of the reopening, which would allow for things like real estate services, outdoor dining and barbershops to operate, is more likely to begin in July than in [June](#).

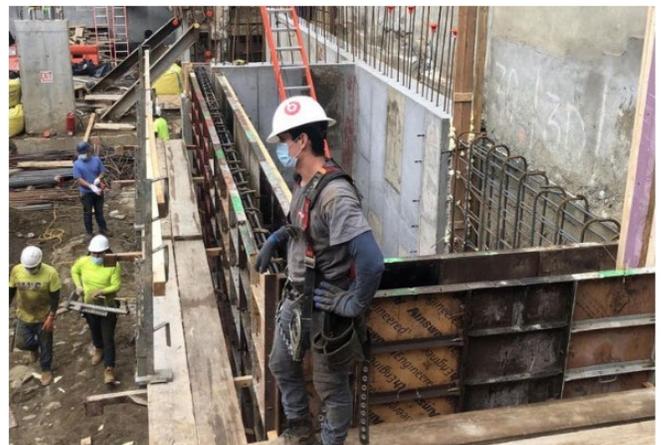
"I'm being a little cautious — this is a big, big step," de Blasio said. "And when we do Phase 1, it means hundreds of thousands of people coming back to work. Let's make sure we've got it right."

Industry groups are working to provide a road map for how to operate in this entirely new reality. On Sunday, the Real Estate Board of New York, the Building Construction Trades Council of Greater New York and the Building Trades Employers Association released their official framework for [construction](#) sites to safely operate.

Dubbed the "remobilization plan," the framework the groups agreed on outlines a set of protocols and "temporary adjustments" for the construction industry. Face masks are now required on all union construction sites, and the agreement sets out "creative measures" to reduce worker density, including staggered start times.

It also sets out requirements for cleaning and disinfecting. The BCTC and BTEA will monitor sites with a newly formed oversight committee, according to a joint release.

The details were released a few days after REBNY, in coalition with multiple business and labor union groups, laid out [guidelines](#) for the re-entry of commercial office buildings, which will be part of Phase 2.



Courtesy of Thomas Campbell
A Thorobird Cos. construction site in the Bronx, which has been able to continue operating through the coronavirus pandemic.

Pulling together advice from multiple government and public health authorities, the best practices advise that all mechanical, electric and plumbing systems be checked before buildings open their doors again. They also suggest that measures to allow for social distancing in all common areas should be implemented.

Anyone going into an office building should wear face coverings, per the advice, and all office buildings should have the capacity to run daily health screenings.

“Our focus is building confidence and public trust that there is a way to get back to work safely and healthily,” REBNY Vice President of Policy and Planning Zachary Steinberg said in an interview Monday. “I think that is the thing that we are focused on.”

He said essential construction sites that have kept running paved a way forward, and when it comes to office advice, REBNY wanted to make sure there was less “information overload” for its members.

“I think [hitting Phase 1] is a testament to how hard the city and New Yorkers have worked for this,” he said. “It’s been a hard few months.”

With more than 22,000 people dead from the virus in the city, nearly a million jobs said to be lost and a possible \$9B budget shortfall, a significant [rebuilding effort lies ahead](#).

Many in real estate have predicted it will take months before any form of recovery begins, even as construction sites that have lain dormant resume and more workers trickle back to their desks. Some believe the pain will be felt in the city’s real estate market for years to come.

“We are looking at a difficult 18 to 24 months any way you cut it,” Joy Construction principal Eli Weiss told Bisnow last week. Weiss' company is building around 1,000 affordable housing units in the city.

And while the city has reeled from the impact of the pandemic, the last two weeks have also been dominated by a wave of demonstrations as protestors have taken to the streets to rail against racial injustice and police brutality. Looting and vandalism shook the city early last week as retailers and landlords boarded up storefronts to protect from [further potential damage](#).

“We must not forget that as New York City begins reopening, we are still in the midst of extraordinary challenges,” Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union President Stuart Appelbaum said in a statement Sunday.

He stressed New Yorkers need to continue wearing masks in stores and that business owners must ensure social distancing among employees, provide appropriate personal protective equipment and give workers adequate sick leave. He also addressed George Floyd, whose death while in police custody last month in Minneapolis triggered the protests that have spread across the nation.

“Workplace protections alone are not enough to ensure safety. We are deeply troubled by the behavior of the police towards protestors since the tragic death of George Floyd. New York City’s retail workforce is incredibly diverse and as we return to work we need to know that all workers will be safe as they come to and from work,” Appelbaum said. “We must make this a city where black lives matter.”



FlickrGov. Andrew Cuomo
Gov. Andrew Cuomo rode the subway Monday morning, June 8, 2020.



Bisnow/Miriam Hall
People rallied in Harlem during mass protests the first week of June.