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Baker preps guidelines for construction to continue 'safely'

By Colin A .Young, State House News Service

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While much of the work done in Massachusetts has shifted to being performed remotely, if at all, during the coronavirus pandemic, many construction sites are still buzzing with activity and the Baker administration is planning to provide some guidance in the coming days to ensure that work is done safely.

On Monday, Department of Transportation Highway Administrator Jonathan Gulliver wrote to Construction Industries of Massachusetts to confirm that MassDOT "is continuing implementation of its capital program as an essential government function" and that the companies that have secured state contracts related to the capital program "are all exempt for work to support the capital program."

Baker said Tuesday that his administration is finalizing guidance "to establish standards around safe practices for construction work in Massachusetts" during the outbreak of COVID-19. In Boston, Mayor Martin Walsh ordered construction sites to shut down for two weeks, but the state has not followed suit.

The governor said Tuesday that it is not so simple to shut down construction projects for a few days or weeks, and that "you may be shutting it down permanently in some cases." He said the work being done "has significant value" to the public.

"No one disputes the fact that we have a housing problem in Massachusetts. We have a lot of housing construction currently going on in Massachusetts. To completely lose, potentially, all of that new housing for the commonwealth, housing stock, would be a tremendous loss," Baker said during his press conference Tuesday. "There's public construction that's going on that needs to be completed. Some of it has to do with upgrading existing infrastructure, but a lot of it has to do with expanding infrastructure that people have deemed critical and important, that needs to be continued and finished."

During the same press conference, Baker said the state had reached out to the construction industry to request donations of face masks for health care providers, but many in the construction industry have bristled at the request since workers will need masks themselves if the state wants job sites to continue the progress on public projects. - Colin A. Young/SHNS | 3/24/20 4:56 PM

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