



March 20, 2020

The Honorable Brad Little
Governor of the State of Idaho
State Capitol, PO Box 83720
Boise, Idaho 83720

Re: DHS Guidance on Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers During COVID-19 Response

Dear Governor Little:

We are writing on behalf of the forest products industry and their employees in Idaho. As you and your administration consider difficult decisions to protect the health and safety of families and workers, we respectfully urge the State of Idaho to adopt policies consistent with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Recovery Agency's *Memorandum on Identification of Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers During COVID-19 Response* dated March 19, 2020. This guidance states:

“If you work in a critical infrastructure industry, as defined by the Department of Homeland Security, such as healthcare services and pharmaceutical and food supply, you have a special responsibility to maintain your normal work schedule.”

The national guidance specifically identifies “[w]orkers who support the manufacture and distribution of forest products, including, but not limited to timber, paper, and other wood products” as part of the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce.

As you know, Idaho's forest products industry is one of the most significant in the country in relation to the state's total economy. It is estimated that Idaho's wood and paper industries account for nearly one-fifth of all the labor income generated in the state and more than one-tenth of the state's total employment.¹ The average Idahoan forest products industry worker earned \$56,600 per year, more than 30% higher than the Idaho average of \$43,480 for all jobs.²

¹ Idaho Forest Products Commission, “The forest products industry is a thriving economic force in Idaho,” available at: <https://idahoforests.org/forest-information-topic/economic-benefits-of-idahos-forests/>.

² Occupational Employment Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, Idaho (May 2018), available at: https://www.bls.gov/oes/2018/may/oes_id.htm#00-0000.

The forest products industry also plays an important role in critical infrastructure in North America in many ways, including:

- Wood building products are the principal building material used across a myriad of infrastructure projects, including emergency medical and lodging structures, and temporary buildings, as well as timely refurbishing or repurposing of existing facilities for immediate use. As an example, there are established design guidelines for modest buildings up to 16' x 24' in size that can be constructed within 24 hours and withstand both high winds and seismic forces. These are not “temporary” buildings but rather can be erected quickly for immediate use. These designs were shared with emergency responders for use following the natural disasters in Haiti and Puerto Rico, among other places.
- Residuals from wood products manufacturers are used extensively by pulp and paper mills, which are then used in tissue, personal hygiene and packaging products—critically-needed products during this crisis.
- Wood products manufacturing facilities provide materials for construction supply lines.
- Many wood product manufacturers generate electricity for the public utility grid using carbon neutral biomass.
- Our mills are constructed and operate in a way that supports social distancing, and stringent safety procedures are already the norm.
- Wood products facilities are frequently located in rural communities and provide family-wage jobs that are otherwise in very short supply in those areas. Maintaining employment at wood products facilities through this crisis is essential to prevent disastrous effects on rural economies.

We appreciate the considerable challenges our elected officials, administrators, and others are facing in making decisions aimed at protecting communities and workers across the country. We stand ready in this unprecedented situation to work with state, federal, and local officials to protect public health while also working to safeguard critical supply chains and cushion economic effects on vulnerable Idaho workers.

As state policy leaders navigate these challenging times and consider measures to protect the public, and for the above reasons, we respectfully request that you strongly consider and adopt the Department of Homeland Security’s national guidelines for Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers—which include the forest products industry—to protect and support critical supply chains, workers, communities, and Idaho businesses.

Sincerely,



Travis Joseph
President/CEO
American Forest Resource Council