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Homebuilders Call on Governor Inslee to Restart Construction This Week

Olympia, WA Leaders at the Building Industry Association of Washington (BIAW) said today they were encouraged to hear Gov. Inslee indicate construction could return safely and called on the governor to this week implement the recommendations made by his working group to restart construction activities.

“The governor has had over a week to consider the safety recommendations made unanimously by the advisory group he assembled,” stated Greg Lane, BIAW Executive Vice-President, who served on the working group. “Over the last few days, nearly 1200 of our members have sent to the governor personal pledges to comply with all of the new safety requirements. We are committed to keeping employees and the public safe. The governor now needs to take action this week and allow residential construction to re-open in Washington.”

At a loss of \$23 million per day in family-wage jobs, the shutdown of residential construction has now cost Washingtonians nearly \$650 million in lost wages. Currently, the construction industry ranks the second-highest in claims for unemployment in Washington State, which Lane explained was a completely avoidable situation.

“Time is of the essence,” said Lane. “We have demonstrated that construction can operate safely. There is no need to wait to until May when our state’s economy will have lost nearly a billion dollars in family wages. Housing is essential and residential construction needs to be re-opened.”

Issued last month, the governor’s executive order deemed construction as nonessential unless it fell within three limited categories: public works, subsidized housing, and emergencies involving harm to people or damage to property.

“Allowing publicly-subsidized construction to continue under the original order was itself an admission that residential construction does not pose an unacceptable risk to public health,” said Lane. “There is simply no evidence that construction activity has increased COVID 19 risk here or anywhere in the country.”

BIAW continues to support the proposed safety protocols submitted to the governor, which exceed standards that essential businesses such as grocery stores or food-handling are currently using in Washington state, and would be the most stringent in the country for construction.

Confusion and inconsistent enforcement of the order are also creating problems. Most contractors have been told that construction necessary to complete homes under contract to buyers who could end up displaced is not permitted, yet other owners in the exact same circumstances have been given authorization by the governor's office to proceed. The resulting confusion has led to local jurisdictions and builders mystified by interpretations of the order that seem arbitrary.

"Cities and counties are interpreting the governor's order in a variety of ways, which is creating a high degree of frustration in efforts to comply and operate in unfair circumstances," said Lane. "For example, one of our members had a construction site vandalized after shutting it down to comply, but then was fined by a local health authority for the acts of the vandals."

"We all share the goal of stopping the spread of COVID 19," concluded Lane. "However, the vast majority of states and the federal government allow residential construction and haven't seen a danger to public health from that activity. It's time that construction in Washington is allowed safely back to work."

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The Building Industry Association of Washington is the voice of the housing industry as the state's largest trade association with nearly 8,000-member companies employing approximately 265,000 people. The association is dedicated to ensuring and enhancing the vitality of the building industry for the benefit of its members and the housing needs of the citizens. Learn more at: www.biaw.com

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