

Pennsylvania Governor OKs May 8 Construction Restart



Gov. Tom Wolf announces that construction on all projects will resume May 8, with strict guidelines in place. *Photo courtesy Office of the Governor*

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Pam Radtke Russell

Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf (D) announced April 20 that construction can resume in the state May 8, in accordance with safety guidelines that have yet to be released by the governor's office.

Wolf shut down all non-life sustaining business in the state on March 21, including all but essential construction projects, in an effort to stem the cases of COVID-19. The cases in the state seemed to have hit a peak about April 9. On April 20, the state reported 948 new cases for a total of 33,252 and a total of 1,204 deaths. The state was initially set to reopen on April 30.

"Construction is a key part of Pennsylvania's economy, and the men and women that work on construction sites across the Commonwealth are eager to get back to work," Michael V. Griffin, president of the Americas region for Philadelphia-based Hill International Inc., said in a statement emailed to ENR. Hill ranked No. 8 on the ENR 2019 Top 100 Construction Management-for-Fee Firms with nearly \$660 million in revenue.

The announcement came as Wolf on April 20 vetoed Senate Bill 613, which passed the legislature last week. The bill would have required the Wolf administration to follow federal guidelines to reopen.

"This is not an easy decision, but it is the right course for Pennsylvania," Wolf wrote in his veto message. "Reopening tens of thousands of businesses too early will only increase the spread of the virus...and extend the length of the economic hardships created by the pandemic. Instead, we need a measured and staggered approach to reopening the economy."

Public and private residential and non-residential construction may resume May 8, joining ongoing projects already deemed life-sustaining by the state.

"I want to caution that we will not be resuming operations as they were in February," Wolf said in a statement. "We're going to continue to take precautions that limit our physical contact with others, and we will closely monitor this to see if it can be done safely."

David Daquelente, executive director of the Master Builders' Association of Western Pennsylvania, said in an email, "We recognize that Gov. Wolf's announcement today signals an improving trend in the available data on the COVID-19 pandemic and this is a great indication of the overall health of our fellow Pennsylvanians."

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Deputy Editor Pam Radtke Russell is a New Orleans-based journalist with more than a decade covering energy, environment and climate for ENR, Platts, CQ Roll Call in Washington D.C. and the Times-Picayune in New Orleans. She was part of the Times-Picayune team that worked from Baton Rouge after Hurricane Katrina and was awarded two Pulitzer Prizes for journalism in 2006 for public service and breaking news.

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