

Face Masks and Crane Crews...

Since the start of the COVID-19 restrictions, construction has been considered an essential service and provided work for thousands of employees in Melbourne. Construction works have remained operational because construction workers have observed necessary precautions.

As you will all be aware, mandatory face masks are now required in Melbourne and Mitchell shire to be enforced after 11.59pm on Wednesday 22 July 2020. The fine for not wearing a face mask will be \$200 and an inspection and enforcement blitz will be carried out in workplaces across Melbourne by Victoria Police and WorkSafe inspectors. If an employer is found to be discouraging face coverings, they face a \$9913 fine.



Where does this leave crane crews that rely on whistle and radio communication to complete their high-risk work? The masks pose a threat to the safety of crane crews for the following reasons:

- Whistles are impossible to use without removing the mask.
- Voices are partially muffled by masks reducing clarity of critical instructions.
- Communications at close quarters are often significantly non-verbal meaning it's harder to understand instruction with a face covering.
- Many construction workers have below average hearing meaning they rely partly on lip reading.

Mandatory face coverings or masks in Melbourne still apply to construction sites so a clear understanding of how to use them safely and what provisions need to be taken, is crucial.

WorkSafe have stated that:

- A mask would need to be removed for a dogger or rigger to provide whistle signals.
- A crane operator does not require a mask if he/she is in crane by themselves.
- A tower crane operator will require a mask during commissioning if anyone else is in cabin at the same time.
- Any crane operator will require a mask if multiple persons operate the crane if no cleaning is being conducted between operator changes.



Radios described in [Bulletin 261](#) are very common among crane crews. If you use a radio while wearing a face mask it is strongly advised that you do a radio check with the mask on before beginning work. If there is any degradation in the level of comprehension across the channel due to the mask, it is recommended to lower or remove the mask.

Premier Andrews used the examples of the work activity in call centres and jogging for exercise where the use of a mask may not be feasible, but you must have a mask to wear when you stop those activities. A face covering should be kept handy for use on site outside of the critical radio/whistle/voice dependent tasks.

We all have to do our bit to stop the spread of COVID-19 and follow the rules laid out while working safely. However, there are exceptions to the rule of mandatory masks on construction sites where there are OH&S issues related to their usage whilst conducting high risk work.

Common sense is the key here.

Stay Safe -CICA