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Building homes in Valley is deemed essential — but not easy — amid coronavirus outbreak

Some developers have been forced to put their projects on hold amid the global coronavirus pandemic.

By [OLGA GRIGORYANTS](#) | ogrigoryants@scng.com | Los Angeles Daily News
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Construction — especially building homes — is considered an essential task in California amid the coronavirus outbreak. And scores of construction projects are underway in the San Fernando Valley.

But some developers say they have nonetheless been forced to put their projects on hold as the pandemic worsens.

Toll Brothers, developing a swatch of homes in Porter Ranch, told investors that [the virus outbreak in China had led to a shortage of appliances, forcing it to delay the sales of 11 homes](#). The Academy Museum of Motion Pictures halted construction last week. So did the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art.

According to an Associated Builders and Contractors analysis of data released Friday by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the construction industry lost 29,000 jobs in March.

In the Northeast Valley, Primestor Development Inc. had to push the pause button in its project to remodel the the Panorama mall. CEO Arturo Sneider said his team had to halt its overhaul of the mall's interior because mall tenants needed to close their businesses, deemed non-essential by the state and city.

"We had to put it on hold," he said. "We are working with tenants who are closing their operations," he said.

[Since the coronavirus broke out](#), his team has been focusing on providing security and dealing with fire safety issues rather than construction, he said.

Permits also pose a challenge for many. Obtaining documents from the city agencies has been a challenge since the Department of Building and Safety has temporarily closed its centers, said Doug Lewiskin, chief executive of residential and commercial mortgage and real estate brokerage company The Arch Corporation.

"It's been difficult to obtain permits to move forward," he said. "It has an effect on financing."

And then there are supplies, some of which come from overseas.

Joe Natarelli, a national construction industry leader at accounting services firm Marcum, said about 30 percent of building materials being imported from China, the origin point of the novel coronavirus.

“We’re going to start seeing material price increases along with the delays,” he said. “We’re proactively advising our clients to make sure they find other supply chains but I think there’s going to be shortages and prices increases there.”

Staffing projects has been especially challenging. Some workers aren’t eager to head to worksites for fear of catching the virus. Others are forced to stay home to tend to their children while schools across Southern California are closed, Natarelli said.

[Aiming to stop the spread of the virus among construction workers](#), L.A. Mayor Eric Garcetti ordered new guidelines after a crew member on the mammoth \$5 billion SoFi Stadium project in Inglewood tested positive for coronavirus.

The new guidelines require all construction sites to:

- Create a COVID-19 exposure plan
- Enable symptom checks by city inspectors
- Provide crews with masks, gloves and goggles
- Assure hygiene stations on sites
- Complete contamination of work areas when appropriate
- And assure social distancing of workers.

“If you infect one employee, you can infect the whole job site and shut it down” for a long time, Natarelli said.

Natarelli added that each developer will need to make a choice on how to move forward with construction.

“A lot of this stuff,” he said, “is uncharted territory.”