As state and local governments shut down or grind to a halt with the spread of the coronavirus, the construction industry is pushing to keep projects up and running. The industry employs 7.6 million Americans, or 5% of the workforce.

Some states have deemed construction workers as non-essential or have ordered building sites to close, which has urged industry groups and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to write to President Trump last week asking the administration to lift local quarantine orders for construction workers. Their plea highlights the trade off between battling the spread of the virus and keeping the economy on track.

There are ways to maintain best health and safety practices while working on construction sites. Becker Shareholder, Steve Lesser, recommends being vigilant to keep all workers healthy but also being cautious of unfinished projects and delays. “Keeping workers a safe distance apart involves complex choreography on a construction site as workers shift between task,” he said. “One worker not showing up because they are quarantined or caring for someone who is sick can hold up other jobs on the project.” These delays can turn a profitable project into an unprofitable one and unfinished projects can pose a safety hazard.

For now, most construction sites remain open. Meanwhile the Labor Department reported 3.28 million applications for unemployment benefits in the week ended March 21.
