

Gov. Evers: Issues order to provide flexibility for various professions during COVID-19 public health emergency

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MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers today issued Emergency Order #22 to position the Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) to continue providing its critical services by giving it flexibility to adapt to the new environments and circumstances due to the COVID-19 public health emergency. It covers a range of service areas and constituents, including fire departments, construction services, physical therapists and certified public accountants—all of which have faced new challenges as a result of this public health emergency.

“I cannot think of a single aspect of life that COVID-19 has not touched. The longer this goes on, the more people are struggling,” said Gov. Evers. “We need to take steps to alleviate stress where we can, so individuals can focus on more immediate needs and not worry about administrative deadlines and time constraints. We need the flexibility in state government to adapt to the situation at hand and prioritize efforts that will help us better protect health and safety.”

First responders are always critical to maintaining health and safety, but COVID-19 is demanding even more of our fire departments. Right now, fire departments must work even harder to keep employees well while still executing their duties and serving their communities. That is why this order extends reporting deadlines for the “2 percent fire dues program,” which provides fire departments with funding for equipment, training, and other operations. Fire departments now have until June 1, 2020 to file. The order also gives fire departments greater discretion to postpone inspections or public fire education training so that they can focus more of their energy and effort on immediate health and safety needs.

COVID-19 is also forcing the healthcare system to quickly expand facilities and service. This order streamlines the construction process for critical structures so that we have the spaces we need to provide healthcare to those suffering from COVID-19. The order also suspends specific time limits for conducting inspections and issuing permits on non-critical buildings, making it easier for DSPS and partnering municipalities to adjust to changing processes and prioritize critical buildings, such as isolation centers.

Other elements of the order extend exam deadlines for certified public accountant candidates, since most testing centers are currently closed. Also, some face-to-face requirements for physical therapists and physical therapy assistants are temporarily suspended. This enables them to use technology to evaluate performance and patients during the public health emergency. Finally, the order enables DSPS to take more steps to better protect staff and customers. With in-person interaction discouraged, the order gives DSPS the authority to limit paper plan submission by contractors in a variety of construction fields.

“The world is changing, and we can change with it,” said DSPS Secretary-designee Dawn Crim. “This order positions us to prioritize and facilitate critical work. It also enables us to extend the flexibility that our customers and constituents need right now. That way we can all focus on what is most important and do everything we can to keep our fellow Wisconsinites safe.”

Emergency Order #22 is available [here](#).