

# PPE Distribution: Prioritizing the Health & Safety of Our Essential Workers

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*Agricultural Commissioner's Office essential workers distributing personal protective equipment.*

In March of 2020, California Governor Gavin Newsom, and Monterey County Health Officer Edward Moreno, issued Shelter-in-Place orders to protect the health and well-being of citizens from the spread of COVID-19. As essential government workers, personnel from the Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner's Office (MCAC) were exempted from the orders. This allowed MCAC to continue providing valuable services to the agricultural industry in Monterey County.

As the pandemic worsened, the available supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) and hand sanitizer began to dwindle. The MCAC took decisive action as a result. The MCAC office surveyed the local agricultural community to assess PPE and hand sanitizer needs county-wide. The survey results showed a dire need was looming.

With the health and safety of the agricultural workers in mind, and in cooperation with the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), the MCAC took steps to obtain a supply of PPE and hand sanitizer to provide to local growers, farm labor contractors, and pest control businesses to give, free of charge to their workers.

In 2020, the MCAC office received multiple shipments of hand sanitizer, disposable surgical masks, reusable cloth masks and N95 respirators.

These supplies were distributed at eight events held over the course of a year at the MCAC's main office in Salinas, King City, and several smaller distribution events in partnership with local community-based organizations and industry trade associations.

In addition to the pandemic related lack of PPE availability, growers faced another obstacle when a mid-August lightning storm ignited not just one fire, but three wildfires. The River, Carmel and Dolan fires produced challenging conditions throughout the county. The MCAC was able to provide much needed N95 particulate respirators to the agricultural community to protect workers from smoke inhalation, allowing for growing operations to continue throughout the smoke-filled weeks that followed.

So far, MCAC staff has distributed over 50,000 bottles of hand sanitizer, 101,500 reusable adult cloth masks, 41,400 reusable children's cloth masks, 200,000 vinyl gloves, 1,766,890 disposable surgical masks, and 857,960 N95 respirators.

The Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner's Office will hold more distribution events during 2021.