

Business as unusual

The global coronavirus pandemic has presented the cement and other economic sectors with considerable challenges. Benjamin Sporton, CEO of the Global Cement and Concrete Association (GCCA), shares his thoughts.

■ by **Benjamin Sporton**, Global Cement and Concrete Association, UK

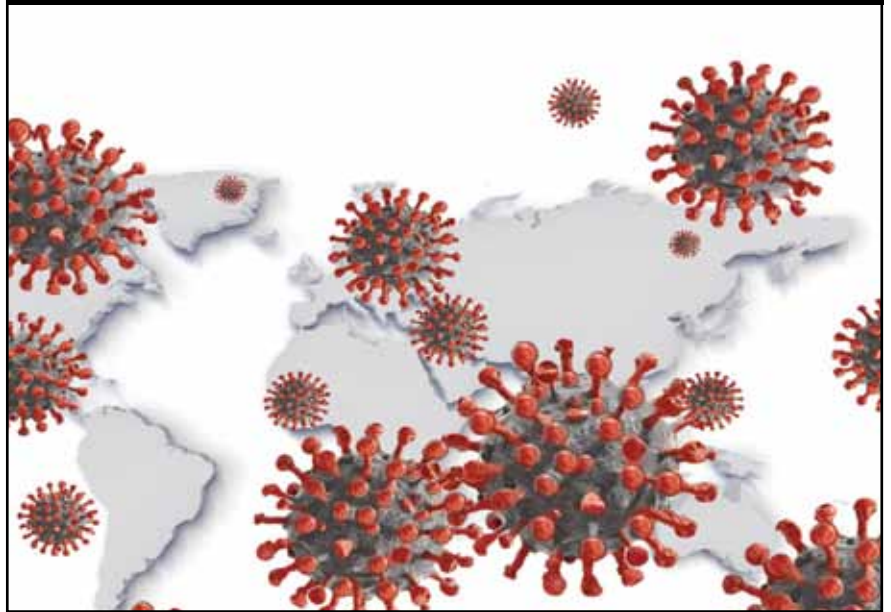
The global COVID-19 pandemic, in different stages of intensity and development around the world, has presented us with challenges on all fronts that would have been unthinkable scarcely a few months ago. This shift in how we exist is unprecedented and will likely change the way we work for decades to come.

Our survival and wellbeing, and that of our families, businesses and communities, has been the immediate priority over recent weeks. When this crisis is over, there will be a time to reflect. We will look back at how we behaved as individuals, as a society, and how business and industry responded.

I am confident that our industry is guided by solid, established principles and has continued to do the right thing throughout the crisis. Given the effect and reach of the virus across the world, through all strata of society and across

“As an essential industry, our members are also continuing to make an important contribution to wider society during the crisis. It is continuing to maintain supply of key materials for the construction and upkeep of essential infrastructure, including hospitals to treat the sick and vital transport infrastructure to ensure supply chains remain open.”

The global COVID-19 pandemic is leading to an unprecedented shift in how we exist



all industries, the phrase “we are all in this together” has never been more valid. GCCA members are closely following the advice of national and local authorities, communicating with their workforces, and where they can, supporting efforts to tackle the pandemic.

Health and safety is the most important priority for the cement and concrete industry. The wellbeing of our employees and the communities we work in is paramount to our efforts. It is our key responsibility as an industry but also as people who care about those we work and interact with each day.

Industry support for communities

GCCA provides guidelines, guidance and good practices for our members on a range of key issues, including workplace safety and wellbeing. As a member and CEO-led initiative, we are reacting to the crisis to ensure we can assist our members to learn from each other and share best practices on a new and emerging disease.

COVID-19 is currently the focus of regularly-scheduled health and safety working group online meetings and we are keeping the industry connected through regular updates.

On World Day for Safety and Health at Work, at the end of last month, we held our first global online forum on health and safety. As well as a key discussion with our members, we also opened this up to other non-members from our industry because we thought it was the right thing to do.

As an essential industry, our members are also continuing to make an important contribution to wider society during the crisis. It is continuing to maintain supply of key materials for the construction and upkeep of essential infrastructure, including hospitals to treat the sick and vital transport infrastructure to ensure supply chains remain open.

An additional crisis-related issue is the larger quantities of COVID-19-contaminated health care waste needing to be disposed of safely and sustainably, and which some of our member companies

SUBSCRIPTIONS 2020



The cement industry's leading monthly publication, delivered direct to your desk by First Class Airmail with early access to the digital magazine via CemNet.com.

MONTHLY MAGAZINE

FREE HANDBOOK

ACCESS TO CemNet.com
– the home of ICR

Annual subscription to ICR
GBP 205 / USD 315 / EUR 260

Subscribe online at

www.CemNet.com/subscribe

“At this difficult and challenging time, our thoughts are with all those impacted by the health crisis as well as with our employees and their families, our colleagues across the built environment and the communities we are a part of.”

have been able to assist with through co-processing in their kilns.

GCCA members are also contributing to local efforts in their communities. Examples include donating PPE masks from laboratories to local health care efforts, providing trucks to clean local streets, as well as making financial donations to hospitals and frontline services.

The wider construction industry has also contributed with unprecedented builds. Field hospitals have been constructed in a matter of days, with industry and governments collaborating and responding at a speed not seen in peacetime. Our members are doing this at the same time as trying to manage and protect their businesses from the severe economic strains arising from the crisis.

Building a more resilient and fairer society

Additionally, we must also prepare for what comes next. Our sector provides an essential material for economic recovery and ongoing development. While it is impossible to look ahead with any certainty as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, the macrolevel trends that affect longer-term cement and concrete requirements are still in place – population growth, urbanisation, the need for greater resilience as well as the need for social and health care.

The lockdown and ‘shelter in place’ measures introduced through the crisis have thrown the need for safe and sustainable housing, which so many in the world still lack, into stark relief. The global appetite for building a fairer society, with the provision of clean water, safe and resilient communities for all, will surely be even greater once we emerge from the crisis. Our sector has a key role to play. There will be a strong desire for development, and the need for that development to be sustainable is likely to be just as strong.

Learnings to take forward

In responding to this global challenge there are learnings to take forward when responding to others – the most urgent of these being climate change. When the immediate crisis passes, all actors – industry, government and individuals – can look to tackle the longer-term challenges with the same resolve as we now have in the midst of this crisis. This should be the shared focus of the recovery period and one to which I know our industry is wholeheartedly committed – building a sustainable and safer future world.

At this difficult and challenging time, our thoughts are with all those impacted by the health crisis as well as with our employees and their families, our colleagues across the built environment and the communities we are a part of. ■