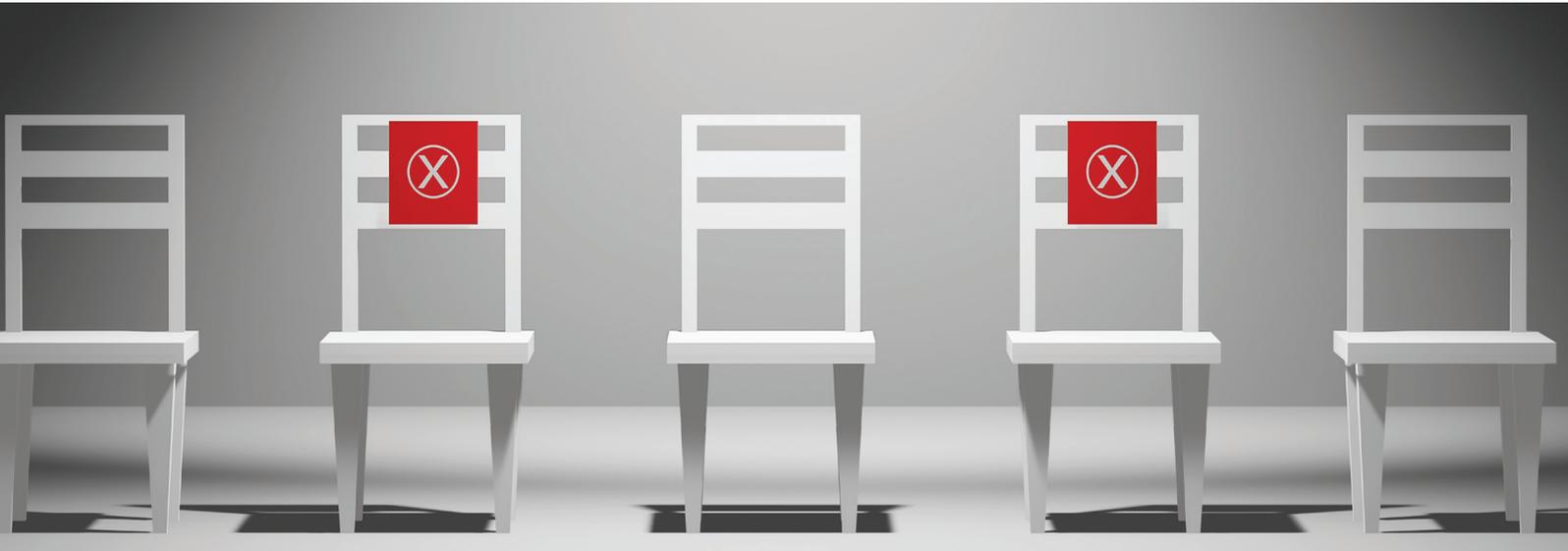


Our daily lives have drastically changed but that does not mean business stops. Experts believe that social distancing is here to stay, possibly for as long as a couple of years. According to a group of disease specialists from the Harvard T.H. Chad School of Public Health, "...some form of intermittent social distancing may need to be in place until 2022" due to a strong likelihood of future outbreaks occurring as lockdowns are lifted.

As the impact of COVID-19 continues to shake up our industry, right of way acquisition agents and relocation consultants have been creating alternative ways to continue providing essential services for public and private agency clients and tenants while maintaining the required social distancing rules enforced by the CDC.

Like all of our fellow right of way professionals, OPC agents have been developing solutions to maintain operations with minimal interruptions despite the pandemic.



# SOCIAL DISTANCING SOLUTIONS

For right of way agents and relocation consultants

**BY TODD SALVATORE, MAGGIE HARRY, SEAN KERR, TOMEK KAWKA AND MARIA BRIEF**

## Staying Connected While Maintaining Social Distancing

As essential services providers, we know that many housing and infrastructure projects must move forward despite challenging circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Having a project collaboration tool like OPC's SharePoint® platform (which provides client access to case files in a centralized and organized portal) is vital to maintain ongoing operations with little to no interruptions.

Instead of physically meeting with clients or tenants, most communication can now be done via video conference, email, telephone and certified mail. With the popularity of smartphones and conferencing apps, relocation agents, clients and tenants have the technological means to conduct business remotely, giving them a head start adjusting to this new way of doing business. For OPC, we have found that these forms of communication have been well received by both clients and tenants on OPC's current relocation projects and it has enabled most business to remain uninterrupted.

## Tips and Considerations

If a company is looking to invest in better IT infrastructure to accommodate remote workforce, OPC's IT Director has a few suggestions:

- Look into remote access systems from big players, such as Microsoft, Citrix, Cisco and VMware.
- Use virtualization for better systems scalability.
- Use cloud-based collaboration technologies such as Office 365 SharePoint, Skype for Business, Microsoft Teams and Zoom.
- Improving security is essential as working remotely comes the added exposure to attacks and vulnerabilities. Companies like KnowBe4, an automated security awareness program, provides staff training on ways to protect the company data from cyberattacks.

## Further Challenges

Many of the tenants who are being relocated are homeless, low-income, elderly or disabled persons who may not have smartphones or communication apps. The needs of our most vulnerable communities must be met as a matter of

public service. To that end, many relocation agents need to continue essential fieldwork while taking defined company measures to ensure their health and safety as well as the health and safety of those in the community. Relocation agents should be equipped with their own personal protective equipment (PPE) and clear guidelines for on-site visits and other personal interactions.

## Case Studies

**Case Study 1:** A rundown motel in a major West Coast metropolis has been a popular place for squatters to live. The City has purchased the motel and has contracted OPC to relocate the squatters, who will be receiving relocation benefits to move out of the motel. Due to the concern that they are unable to maintain proper social distancing, the City is taking immediate action and moving the tenants to another hotel during the pandemic.

**Solution 1:** OPC's agent has been going to the motel every day to deliver notices to the tenants/squatters face-to-face. Wearing a mask, carrying wipes and providing hand sanitizer for himself and the tenants, he takes extra precautions by speaking to the tenants through the door of their room and requesting them to go down to the lobby, which provides enough room for safe social distancing in order to provide notices and relocation checks. It is important to maintain excellence service while social distancing. OPC's relocation agents and project managers provide tenants with "hands on" assistance during the pre-move efforts and on move-day.

**Case Study 2:** As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and social distancing requirements, our agents need to rely now on more tenant participation and less agent participation.

**Solution 2:** OPC created a Pre-Pack and Move Day Instructions guide, which provides the tenants with a breakdown of the necessary tasks needed to complete prior to move day and on move day. The guide provides step by step instructions for them to follow before move day and important safety information to implement during move day. The guide has been accepted by the client and will be circulated to all OPC agents to implement with their clients/tenants.

**Case Study 3:** With project schedules to maintain and social distancing rules to follow, right of way professionals must find creative ways to get documents signed and notarized.

**Solution 3:** Given the agent and the tenants have met multiple times previously, OPC agents decided to do a curbside notary signing. The agent put the document in the tenant's mailbox and waited outside in her car while the tenant read and signed the document in the comfort of their own home. When the tenant was done, they put the signed document in the mailbox along with their driver's license. The agent reviewed the document and completed the notary log in the safety of her own car. 🚗

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