

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTING AS AN “ESSENTIAL SERVICE” IN CANADA

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This brief reviews the deeming of certain businesses as “essential services” in Canada and business continuity for environmental consulting and risk assessment while many homes and places of work are locked down during the current health crisis.
Our article for US clients can be found [here](#).

The Virus

The novel coronavirus named COVID-19 is a challenging topic on which to write, as the story is as fast moving and changing as the virus itself. We won't delve into the science or policy of pandemics in this space; instead, we wish to note and share that provincial governments across Canada have declared that many of the kind of services performed by ERIS clients — be they environmental consultants, engineers or certain other stakeholders — have been deemed “essential” at this difficult time.

Continuation of Business

Knowing your business is “essential” during the pandemic is not the same as conducting business as usual. It's recommended that practitioners engage in discussion with local authorities, industry peers and their trade or professional associations to figure out how best to go about business, while conforming to safety protocols such as self-distancing, frequent hand washing, use of sanitizers, and disinfection of door knobs, steering wheels, tools, etc. Of course, the list of essential services varies from province to province.

Ontario's [essential services list](#) includes categories relevant to our industry, the main being item “34.v.” under Community Services (that also lists waste management services, water treatment and maintenance of critical infrastructure):

“Environmental rehabilitation, management and monitoring, and spill clean-up and response.”

A significant portion of environmental service work fits this category, though practitioners may discover that some Phase I ESA work falls under the “supply chain to essential businesses category.” (ERIS is categorized as an essential service in Ontario as the data and information we supply helps companies allowed to work in the approved categories.)

“We're in constant contact with our colleagues in government and they've been very good at sharing information”, says Alex Gill, Executive Director of the Ontario Environment Industry Association (ONEIA). “Within days of the shutdown, the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade was coordinating province-wide calls with all major industry associations to answer questions and share information. And that allows organizations like ONEIA to share that information with our members in real time.”

British Columbia's [essential services list](#) is similar to those of the other provinces though its layout is unique. BC lists certain environmental services as essential under its “Sanitation” subheading: “Businesses that support environmental management/monitoring and spill clean-up and response, including: Environmental consulting firms, Professional engineers and geoscientists.”

Alberta's [list](#) is similar to the others, with suggestions that some businesses not on the list can still remain in operation as long as distancing and other protocols are maintained.

Alberta is allowing “environmental emergency response and regulatory enforcement” services and also deems essential, various sanitation and waste management or recycling activities, including landfills and hazardous waste treatment. Construction work and services are allowed that support “health and safety environmental rehabilitation projects.” Notably, Alberta deems as essential, “environmental services for agriculture, mining, oil and gas,” which is quite broad.

Quebec's [essential service list](#) is similar, again, but phrases things differently. Its website lists, “enterprises involved in environmental emergencies” and various infrastructure categories but is less specific about environmental services. Under “Construction,” activities are permitted “for maintenance and upkeep of essential activities in connection, in particular, with public and private infrastructures that may create a risk for public health and safety (private dams, management of hazardous and radioactive waste, etc.).” Thus it’s advised that Quebec environmental professionals check with local authorities about whether their specific businesses are deemed essential.

Of course, these sample lists may be different in your jurisdiction and may change so check with your provincial and local government before assuming you can continue practicing your trade. The various provincial environmental business associations like ONEIA, the Environmental Services Association of Alberta (ESAA), and the British Columbia Environmental Industry Association (BCEIA) offer guidance for members and we note ONEIA has an especially robust resource web page for COVID-19 related issues that you can access [here](#). The Canadian Urban Institute has published a noteworthy [COVID-19 resilience guide](#), too.

A note of caution

Organizations that operate in other or multiple jurisdictions must check with provincial and local authorities to see what’s allowed.



We are committed to delivering our services uninterrupted during this difficult time.

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