Incoming tonnages to C&D recycling facilities remain down compared to year ago levels, according to the participants in the C&D Recycling Association's recent biweekly conference calls with recyclers across the United States to determine the effects the pandemic has had on the C&D industry. Some of the recyclers remain 50% off their usual levels this time of year, others only 20%. But the incoming tonnages are creeping up from the previous call, as most report they are at at least 50% of the usual, though sometimes it is still government restrictions on construction keeping the amount of material being generated at a higher rate. As recently as a month ago some of the recyclers were at 20% to 30% of their usual volume.

But the big question is, how will it be from here on out? Probably the best guess is to throw a dart at a dartboard, but nobody is expecting the economy and construction to come roaring back any time soon. This is an important question because businesses need to budget for the rest of this year, and for 2021.

The consensus on incoming tonnages for next year is at best 80% of 2019, a good year. If a company wants growth in tonnages, it will have to go the M&A route.

Much, of course, depends on the economy. Also, how does the construction industry handle social distancing. For example, what about high-rise construction jobs? If only one person is allowed in an elevator at time, and there are 50 workers supposed to work 8 hours on the 40th floor, how do they get up there and back during a shift?

Many aggregate recyclers are seeing their yards getting slammed with material as much roadwork has continued, though some of that may be because as schools and universities have shut down early, paving projects there have started early instead of in the summer as originally planned.

But several recyclers are concerned that right now they are seeing construction projects starting up and material coming in, which is good, but that may only last for a few months. The backlog of projects starting up is dwindling now, especially the big ones, and unless the economy comes back strong and excites developers and the like to keep projects going, the current flow of materials to C&D facilities will fall in a few months. The recyclers find this extremely worrisome.

Markets remain steady, at best. OCC prices are still good, but metals, despite a slight price hike, remain relatively low. Wood remains a challenge. There have been reports that because auto shredders were shut down, meaning a reduction in auto fluff that was used for ADC, C&D fines have found a renewed outlet in some areas.
Bringing them back

It is a mixed bag on employees. Some have reported that because of the generous unemployment benefits being offered right now, those workers laid off at the start of the pandemic are in no hurry to come back. But when they do, companies must have in place policies that follow government guidelines and requirements as far as social distancing and PPE requirements. Not only does that protect the employees, but is the only way to protect the business from lawsuits if somehow an employee catches the virus, whether at work or at home.

Some states, notably California and Illinois, are now saying it doesn’t matter where the employee is infected, if he or she comes down with it they are to be counted against the businesses’ workers comp insurance, effectively relieving the state of the financial burden.

But even when workers are back on the job, this is no time to get complacent about following the virus protection rules. The whole company’s team, especially all management, must be on board with the program and familiar with the social distancing and PPE requirements, and stay on top of it all the time. Letting one’s guard down even for one day invites disaster.