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MEMORANDUM

TO: State Agency Customers

FROM: Delbert H. Singleton, Jr., Division Director

DATE: March 17, 2020

RE: COVID-19 Guidelines & Information

Let me start by saying that, as of this message, the State of South Carolina has NOT closed government offices as a result of the coronavirus, and we plan to continue to provide excellent customer service to all our customers during this time. Our office is also being proactive in assisting our customers with any questions they may have when ordering supplies relating to the virus or in ways to handle procurements during this time.

The management team at SFAA and the Division of Procurement Services have been meeting to discuss implications of the COVID-19 virus and potential impacts to the Agency and Division. Our response and guidelines to our internal team are in line with those published by DHEC. Similar measures may also be taken at the agency level.

As more public events are cancelled, we are recognizing the importance of limiting unnecessary exposure. As such, it is prudent we limit outside traffic in and out of the office to only what is necessary. To that end:

1. We are evaluating if a face-to-face meeting is required or if a phone call is sufficient.
2. We are providing conference call or online options for Pre-bid, Panel Charging, or other meetings that we are conducting.
3. We are looking at options for Webex or other types of virtual meetings for panel evaluations or demonstrations. Platforms such as Zoom, GoToMeeting, etc. could provide this functionality if available and/or necessary.
4. We continue to emphasize the importance of submitting offers on-line. Appropriate steps should be taken to maintain social distancing during public bid openings.

In addition to health and safety issues for employees, we are aware of potential contractual issues for those items that are becoming in high demand. Examples include, hand sanitizer, tissues, toilet paper, face masks, trash bags, etc. Our office has put together the following guidance on placing orders for such items.

Product Availability Medical Supplies (Masks, hand sanitizer, etc.).

All Contractors are experiencing shortages, or are completely out of stock, for these types of supplies. The medical supply Contractors (Grove Medical and Henry Schein) are filling orders as fast as they can, but they are prioritizing fulfillment based on past order history. Meaning if you regularly order N95 masks from them in large quantities, you are more likely to have priority in having your order fulfilled. People who do not buy on a regular basis are either placed at the bottom of the list or are limited in the quantities that they can order. That does not mean you cannot place an order, or that your order will not be fulfilled. Call them, place the order to get in line and they will fulfill them as soon as they can.

Some suppliers are updating their websites by removing items that are not available for order, others are just placing those items on back order. UGUs will want to closely monitor what is on backorder as the severity of the virus starts to wane and the demand for those backordered items decreases or disappears altogether.

Product Availability – Longer Lead Times

For now, most Contractors are looking at 4-8 weeks of lead time for the critically short items associated with the virus, and there is no disruption of availability of other items on contract. However, do not forget that when those critically short items become available, they may be subject to fulfillment restrictions as described above.

Shipping/Delivery Issues

For now, there are no critical shipping or delivery issues other than for those critically short items. However, at least one vendor has already indicated that they are considering restricting delivery to one location in a building instead of “desktop delivery” (delivering to the desk of the person who placed the order) as required by the contract. It's important to note that just as we are looking for ways to reduce human-to-human interaction, the Contractors are as well, so we may need to make allowances during this time. We will be sure to communicate such changes on the contract sheets and in the DisPatcheS Newsletter as necessary.

Any Other Issues

It is unknown what impact this will have on the Contractors from their manufacturer’s perspective. We assume that the companies who make the N95 masks and hand sanitizer are all working overtime to fulfill orders, but they are going to be subject to the same circumstances we face. Meaning their employees could become sick, and that would have an impact on their ability to provide the products. No Contractor specifically mentioned this as an immediate issue when we reached out, but one did indicate they are keeping it in mind as we move forward through this.

Best Practices

1. Call first before ordering. Websites may not have the most up to date information available.
2. Expect delays for the critically short items. Everyone is critically short on these items and they are going to be provided first to those who have the most critical need.
3. Go ahead and place an order to “get in line.” Many Contractors are getting their orders fulfilled based on how many orders they have in the cue. If your order is not in the cue, you will not get it.
4. Be realistic in your orders. Do not order 10 cases of hand sanitizer when one will do.
5. Monitor backordered items. If you no longer need a critically short item on back order, cancel the order to make the item available for others, or at least so that you do not have a large stock just sitting on a shelf somewhere when there are others that truly have an ongoing need.
6. Be mindful of your resources as you are placing orders.
7. Be ready for just about anything.

In response to the ongoing COVID-19 situation, the Materials Management Office has also approved use of any **GSA Disaster Relief and Recovery Schedule** provided the good or service is not already available on State Term Contract. The schedules are to be used only in response to the declared disaster in order to facilitate recovery efforts. To learn more about the procedures required for using GSA Contracts, visit <https://procurement.sc.gov/files/contracts/GSA%20Disaster%20Relief%20Program%20march%2016%202020.pdf>

We will continue to monitor the situation. As this situation evolves and changes, stay informed of new developments. In the meantime, follow CDC and DHEC guidelines to minimize the spread of viruses:

1. Wash hands often
2. Avoid contact with sick people
3. If you are sick – STAY HOME; avoid others