

## COVID-19: Lessons for developing and commissioning new mining technologies`

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**For many of us in the regionally distributed and interconnected mining industries, the pandemic impacts were earlier and broader than most.**

**PDAC, the mining mega-convention that descends on Toronto each spring, started 2020 as per any other year, but by the end of the week the world had changed. Sanitiser bottles appeared on tables, elbow bumps replaced handshakes, and the airports on the trip home were a mix of caution and carnage; a sign of the new reality to which we had now entered.**

**COVID-19 had rapidly spread from being an isolated ‘Wuhan’ virus, and many projects still had field personnel undertaking commissioning and service activities. In the space of a week in March 2020, the focus shifted from urgently completing tasks to evacuating staff back to safety as expeditiously as practicable. Clients were generally supportive of such movements, with similar strategies playing out within their operations.**

**Movements were quickly constrained by pandemic restrictions, and the plane tickets, hotel beds and shipping containers were invariably prioritised for essential operations. Despite high opinions of our indispensability, we ceded priority in most jurisdictions to the public health response.**

**It was only once personnel were back safely in their home cities or in hotel quarantine, stakeholder meetings had been urgently convened across myriad not-yet-ubiquitous online platforms, and formal written correspondence had been exchanged flagging the start of the disruption, that the reality set in; how to continue and complete mining project installations on the opposite side of the continent or world, with operations and suppliers suspended or furloughed, and no certainty as to when personnel and equipment mobility may resume?**

**With very few precedents to draw upon in any of our working careers, the well-intended responses to these disruptions were varied in success, but in any case, will prove formative to how we act in future crises. Whilst we cannot predict with certainty when, where and how the next disaster will occur, it is incumbent on all to take the hard learned lessons of COVID-19 and have disaster response and recovery plans that are updated and reflect our real, lived experiences.**