



## President's Message

# Traveling to Work in the Time of COVID

By WIA President Mike DiGilio, C.P.

Hello, everyone, the pandemic is on the verge of being brought under control. While normal times may still be a long time away from us, many contractors have started to travel for work. Are you one of them? Some members travel and have traveled for work as a regular course of business. What kind of precautions does a wallcovering installer take when going out of town?

Some members travel all over the country to work. Airline travel is down significantly, but if you want fly to a job—and want to fly safely—then masks must be worn at all times while on the plane. Airlines have strict policies and enforcement is constant.

Do you prefer to drive to your out-of-town job site? It's pretty much business as usual. Again, masks and sanitizers are available. Some patrons use gloves as they pump gas, and some do not. It's a personal choice.

All hotels/motels try very hard to keep you safe. They require masks be worn whenever you are in their public spaces. Hand sanitizers and masks are freely available from hotels. All one has to do is ask for them. They go to great lengths to sanitize rooms. Need your room cleaned while you're there like you used to do, pre-COVID? You'll have to wait. Some hotels won't allow housekeeping staff into your room until after you check out.

Would you rather stay at an Airbnb? I look at that situation and believe that most go above and beyond to keep their places clean and germ-free. It only takes one customer with COVID to kill a business.

As any installer knows, you work up an appetite while on the job. Almost all restaurants offer take-out. Some restaurants still allow indoor seating. You can always pack a few lunches in a cooler to keep from starving if you really need to. Most fast-food places have drive-through service. That's probably not the healthiest of choices, but at least you can fill your stomach.

In the beginning of the pandemic, paint stores were closed for indoor shopping. Some still are. If your supplier is still closed for indoor shopping, all you need to do is call in your order, pay over the phone with a credit or debit card, and pick it up. It's the best in luxury customer service.

At the job for an out-of-town customer? Make them feel better about having you do their job by wearing booties, wearing a mask, and even wearing gloves while moving about the house. They want you there—it's why they hired you—so, respect their wishes while on the job. You'll benefit, too, by staying healthy and demonstrating your need to keep yourself and your customer safe and healthy. ■

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# Start an Apprenticeship Program

There is no formal program for apprenticeship in wallcovering installation, nor is there a college degree program in the USA for this skill. However, the trades remain an important, lucrative, and viable career path, despite societal emphasis on college degrees. The Mike Rowe Works Foundation, established by *Dirty Jobs* celebrity Mike Rowe, supports and encourages vocational training in the skilled trades. Apprenticeships are a vital part of that effort.

## Apprenticeship Requirements

The US Department of Labor defines five components for a typical apprenticeship program:

1. Business involvement
2. Structured on-the-job-training
3. Related instruction
4. Rewards for skills gains
5. Nationally recognized credentials.

Apprenticeships often last years. They benefit apprentices by combining education with real-world work that involves teaching the working

student every aspect of the trade. This goes beyond just teaching how to do the job to include client acquisition, customer relationship management, and bookkeeping.

The terms of apprenticeship are not only regulated by many industry labor agreements, but also by law, specifically the 1937 federal law modeled on a 1911 Wisconsin law naming 200 occupations benefiting from apprenticeship programs. Apprenticeship was further broadened by passage of the Manpower Development and Training Act of 1962. State laws also affect the definition and obligations of master craftsmen and apprenticeships. In all definitions, apprenticeship programs combine on-the-job instruction with classroom training. Federal law also requires that apprenticeship programs and individual apprentices enrolled in those programs be registered with the Office of Apprenticeship.

## Benefits of Apprenticeship Programs

With the return on investment of college degrees hitting an all-time low, seeing university graduates coming to the workforce tens – if

not hundreds – of thousands of dollars in debt with education in subjects employers don't value, the allure of trades increases. Celebrities such as Mike Rowe and the core team of *This Old House* promote skilled trades as viable, well-paid, valuable career paths necessary for the continuation of civilization.

Let's face it, that degree in anything ending with



Photo by jp26jp on Pixabay.

“studies” isn’t going anywhere, but the world will always need skilled people who can build, repair, and improve things.

Another beauty of apprenticeship programs is financial: the student graduates from the program with a marketable and valuable skill and no debt from tuition. In fact, the apprentice, as a full-time or near-full-time employee, begins earning a wage from the first day with an average starting salary of \$15 per hour. With wage increases as the apprentice’s skill—and value to his employer—increases, many apprentices complete their hands-on programs earning \$50,000 per year.

### Competency-Based Occupational Frameworks

The American Institute for Innovative Apprenticeship (AIIA) states that “the US Department of Labor contracted the Urban Institute to develop voluntary, consensus-based competency-based occupational frameworks (CBOFs) to help employers and sponsors develop, and apprenticeship officials evaluate, new apprenticeship programs.” Efforts involve the cooperation of many parties, including trade associations like WIA, to ensure that these new apprenticeship programs meet industry needs and support industry acceptance.

The AIIA notes, “Employers or sponsors who want to register a new apprenticeship program can use the CBOFs as a starting point.” For employers needing assistance in establishing an apprenticeship program, the AIIA offers a list of intermediaries in the USA who work with employers and apprentices to design apprenticeship programs.

### Create an Apprenticeship Program

Apprenticeship.gov, an official website of the US government, offers succinct advice on how to create an apprenticeship program. These components include:

- **Paid Jobs:** Apprentices are paid employees with all the rights and obligations of employees. They typically begin at about 50 percent of a journeyman’s wage and earn increases in salary as their skills improve.
- **On-the-Job Training:** The key component of an apprenticeship is the student learning on the job under the direct supervision and tutelage of his or her employer.
- **Classroom Learning:** Here’s one benefit of the COVID-19 crisis--we proved that online learning works. “Classroom” learning does include online learning, so courses available through Wallcovering University can be an important part of your apprentice’s education. The courses can be combined with courses offered by local community colleges.
- **Mentorship:** This requires a skilled professional designated to provide one-on-one support to the apprentice.
- **Credentials:** Registered apprentice programs require that apprentices receive portable, nationally recognized credentials upon successful completion of the program. Certified public accountants and business consulting firm Tyler, Simms & St. Sauveur, PC, offers a list of four tips to creating an apprenticeship program. Thomas Network, a source for product sourcing and supplier selection, also offers guidance for creating a viable apprenticeship program. Their advice overlaps with both recognizing that developing a recognized apprenticeship program isn’t for the fainthearted: it takes planning, collaboration, and a lot of work.

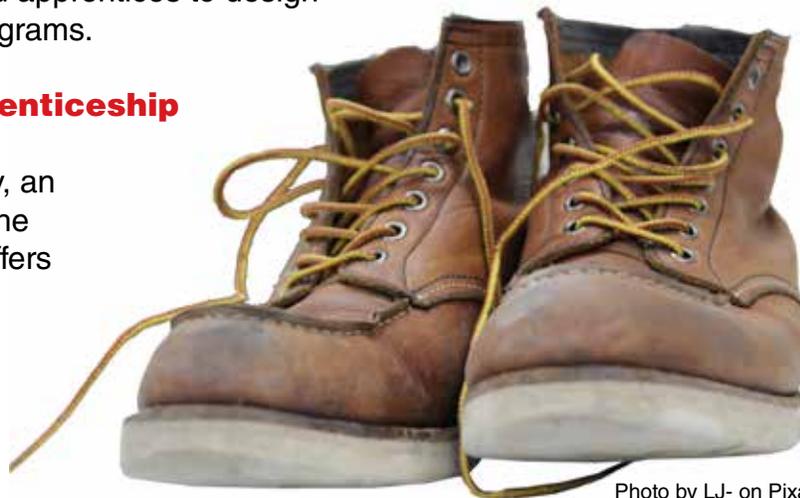


Photo by LJ- on Pixabay.

And if you decide creating a registered apprenticeship program isn’t feasible, then Mike Rowe Works Foundation offers a job listing service specifically for the skilled trades at [jobs.mikeroweworks.org](https://www.mikeroweworks.org). ■

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# A Biden Presidency & Expected Changes to the Gig Economy

It's official. On January 6, the US Congress certified the winner of the 2020 presidential election as Joseph Biden. The nation's government swung from Republican domination to Democrat. The core differences between the two parties may lead to substantial and substantive differences in rights for employees, independent contractors, and gig workers.

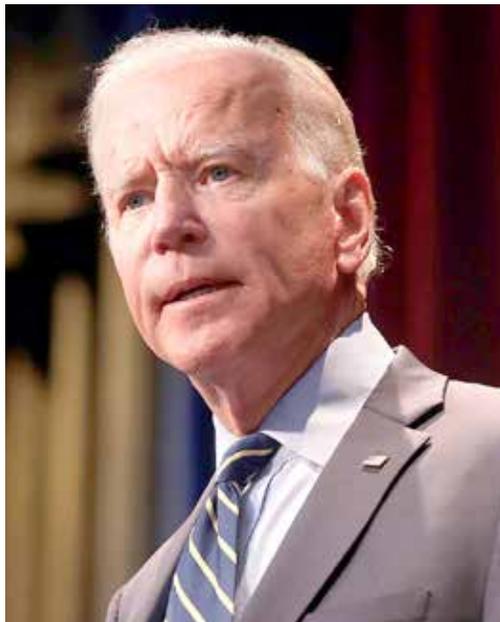
## Worker Classification

Wallcovering installers generally consider themselves self-employed independent contractors: they work for themselves. They enjoy this independence, with many benefitting from clarification of their non-employee status by the Department of Labor under the Trump administration.

On September 22, 2020, the Department of Labor issued a proposed rule to clarify the classification of workers as either employees or independent contractors, the latter of which receive no FLSA protections or benefits such as overtime or guaranteed minimum wage. It passed. The Department of Labor announced its final rule on January 6, 2021. The final rule takes effect on March 8, 2021.

To summarize 29 CFR Parts 780, 788, and 795, the Department of Labor reaffirmed an "economic reality" test to determine whether a worker is in business for himself (or herself) or whether he or she is an employee. This test poses two main questions:

1. What is the degree and nature of the worker's control over the work? For many gig workers like drivers who rely primarily on Uber or



Former Vice President of the United States Joseph Biden speaking with attendees at the 2019 Iowa Federation of Labor Convention hosted by the AFL-CIO at the Prairie Meadows Hotel in Altoona, Iowa. Photo by Gage Skidmore on Wikipedia.

Lyft for their income and whose work practices are governed by those corporate entities, this rule designates them as employees entitled to federally mandated protections and benefits.

2. Does the worker control his or her opportunities for profit and loss based on his or her initiative and/or investment? This question is less clear-cut than the former. A worker can invest everything he or she has in the business and still fail due to circumstances beyond his or her control.

The final rule also "identifies three other factors that may serve as additional guideposts in the analysis, particularly when the two core

factors do not point to the same classification," says the Department of Labor's website: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/flsa/2021-independent-contractor>.

## What a Biden Administration May Mean for Independent Workers

Human resources experts expect President Biden, supported by a Congress led by a Democratic majority, to either reverse the Department of Labor's final rule or enact legislation expanding the definition of "employee." According to an article in SHRM, the new president "supports the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, which, among other changes, would make it harder to classify workers as independent contractors by adopting an "ABC" test." This may occur by the implementation of additional qualifying factors to determine whether someone is an employee or independent contractor. President Biden refers to California's stricter standards

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for worker classification as a model for a new federal standard. According to MarketWatch, Susan Cuffaro, one of the founders of Gig Workers Collective, expects President Biden “to appoint [a] Labor Secretary who is sympathetic to exploited workers in America.”

While most wallcovering installers will find themselves falling squarely within the classification of independent contractor, those who receive all or the majority of their work through construction contractors, interior designers, or other referring professionals may find themselves in the same murky, gray area as rideshare drivers.

The future of freelancing is a huge issue. CNBC reports that, according to a recent Upwork survey, 59 million Americans were engaged in freelance work in 2019, an increase of 2 million from 2018. SCORE reports that the US workforce has 57.3 million full-time freelancers who contribute \$1.4 trillion to the country’s economy. The COVID-19 pandemic has made those numbers swell even more. Writing for CNBC, Elaine Profeldt states, “With many people losing jobs or forced to find more flexible work arrangements by the demands of the pandemic, the issue of worker classification is likely to increase in importance in the next few years.”

While many applaud efforts to more accurately categorize independent contractors from employees, some point out the inconsistencies within Biden’s published plan, “The Biden Plan for Strengthening Worker Organizing, Collective Bargaining and Unions,” which speaks to strengthening enforcement of existing laws prohibiting employers from intentionally misclassifying workers and an endorsement of and intention to model federal policy upon recently enacted California’s AB-5 law.

When California AB-5 took effect, “most freelancers in that state—those who were not exempted, including those that have nothing to do with the gig economy—soon received termination notices from large and small companies and households that had used their services in the past, essentially putting them out of business.” Those freelancers included

consultants providing professional services. The backlash took liberal policy makers by surprise. They amended the law, adding more exempt categories (65 total) of workers; however, that “left in despair hundreds of industries where freelancers predominate.”

The additional exemptions don’t clarify the law, many complain, but add confusion, particularly with regard to which professional services are exempt and which are not: “A perfect example is that licensed psychologists are exempted as professionals, but other licensed professionals who provide mental health therapy—such as licensed marriage and family therapists, social workers, professional clinical counselors, and educational psychologists—were not included.”

### **Are You an Employee or Not?**

With Obama-era veterans appointed to President Biden’s transition team, experts anticipate the return to Obama-era worker protections. This will encompass increased monitoring and enforcement of workplace safety regulations by OSHA, increased minimum hourly wage mandates, and increased risk for employers categorizing their workers as independent contractors, paid leave benefits, and challenges to mandatory arbitration agreements. The Biden platform “commits to encouraging and incentivizing unionization and collective bargaining. He’s promised to create a cabinet-level working group that includes representatives from labor. In the first 100 days of the Administration, the working group will deliver a plan to increase union density and address economic inequality.”

We’ll see what happens in these next months.



Photo courtesy of Rictor Norton & David Allen via Wikimedia.

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# Staying Fit For Older Adults

We're all getting older and most WIA members can boast gray hair. With wallcovering installation being a largely physical profession, maintaining physical fitness becomes even more important as advancing years lead to deterioration in muscle, reduced endurance, and increased weight gain.

## Official Advice: Exercise

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is the nation's arbiter of all things related to health. This government agency addresses the importance of physical activity to healthy aging. Physical activity "can prevent many of the health problems that seem to come with age. It also helps your muscles grow stronger so you can keep doing your day-to-day activities without becoming dependent on others." Another popular and authoritative source for health-related information, WebMD, also emphasizes exercise as the main component for healthy aging. Exercise confers many benefits, including:

- Rebuilding muscle
- Increasing metabolism (burn more calories)
- Preventing, delaying, or improving heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, Alzheimer's disease, arthritis, and osteoporosis
- Maintaining mental acuity.

Harvard Health Publishing echoes this advice, but notes that physical changes as we age can make those intense exercise routines of our youth risky. Simply put, we're not as young as we used to be and our bodies can't handle the strain. Especially for those whose adult lifestyle has become sedentary, a wiser workout includes warming up muscles before exercising.

## Best Exercises for the Over-50 Crowd

Exercise should help older adults lose weight, build muscle, increase flexibility, and improve stamina. Most exercise routines tend to focus on strength or weight loss (burning calories), but



Photo by ArtCoreStudios on Pixabay.

*Balance ball, resistance band, and yoga mat.*

you don't have to choose between them. Best Life offers a list of best exercises for older folks with a focus on strength, flexibility, and balance. Most use the resistance of gravity with some adding weights for additional effort.

## Balls, Bands, and Bars

We're talking **Pilates**, not parties. This low-impact, muscle strengthening exercise discipline was developed early in the 20th century. Like yoga, Pilates also helps improve balance and core strength. Pilates also incorporates the use of resistance bands, balance balls, and barbells to increase the difficulty or intensity of the workout.

## Float Like a Butterfly

Because of the natural deterioration of our bodies as we age, reducing stress on joints and muscles eases the pain of working out. Especially for those suffering from aching bones and joints—arthritis, anyone?—swimming exercises are perfect. If swimming laps isn't your preference, consider **water aerobics**. You'll boost your heart rate and burn calories in an environment that goes easy on your joints.

## Slow and Steady Does It

Originating more than three millennia ago, the term **yoga** combines mental, physical, and spiritual discipline. For this article, we're focusing on the physical aspect. Yoga focuses on muscle strength, aerobic fitness, balance,

and flexibility, all of which age degrades. This low-impact exercise is deceptive: “it’s still weight-bearing, meaning that you have to support your body’s weight in every posture.” Another ancient exercise discipline that focuses on balance and flexibility is **tai chi**. “With a multitude of health benefits, there’s research that suggests this exercise can prevent high blood pressure, heart disease, and alleviate aches and pains. Plus, it’s a stress-buster too, making it a great way to unwind after a tough day,” says Gransnet.



*Walking in a natural environment confers health benefits beyond mere exertion.*

Photo on PXdhere.

### Take a Hike

Walking remains a strongly recommended and popular exercise to burn calories, lose weight, and improve stamina. Even better, it doesn’t require expensive equipment or a personal trainer: all you need is a pair of good walking shoes and maybe a walking stick. Walking outside among natural surroundings also

confers the additional benefits of fresh air and a connection with nature. Physicians recommend a minimum of 10,000 steps per day.

### Or Ride a Bike

If walking isn’t feasible—too hard on the old joints, perhaps?—then consider **bicycling**. Although low-impact and a great way to get outdoors and get the heart pumping, it does require good balance. Those who live where the inclement weather deters biking can take advantage of this exercise by using a stationary bike which can be used indoors and which doesn’t require you to wear a helmet in case you fall.

### The Upshot

It’s important to recognize that exertion is not the same as exercise. Effective exercise **maintains an elevated heart rate for a minimum of 20 minutes**. That, in turn, lends to increased metabolic activity throughout the entire day, enabling your body to burn off calories at a higher rate even while you sleep. You’re not a kid anymore, but that doesn’t mean you can’t look and feel better by improving your health through regular, age-appropriate exercise. ■

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# Wallcovering University Offers 2020 TeleSummit Replay

Did you miss WIA's first TeleSummit which, due to COVID-19 protocols, replaced the association's annual convention? If so, don't fret. WIA's got you covered. That's the beauty of virtual events: they can be easily recorded for future viewing and education.

The TeleSummit, held online on September 26, offered live and pre-recorded sessions on topics near and dear to wallcovering installers. For the affordable price of \$198, WIA members can replay the entire event. The online course covers six classes:

- Session 1: Using Lining Materials with Scenic Wallpapers; Vendor Vignettes for Mutoh America and York Wallcovering; and Intro to Muslin
- Session 2: Being Service-Oriented & Safe in Today's New Environment; Owning Your Worth as a Paperhanger; Hanging Liner & Paper Over Muslin; and Online Estimating Tool for Commercial Jobs
- Session 3: Mutoh's Lunch Session
- Session 4: Roman Products' Lunch Session
- Session 5: How to Measure Wallpaper; Vendor Vignette for Cavalier Papers; and Reverse Match Commercial Vinyl
- Session 6: Profiling; The Ins & Outs of Trimming to Complex Moldings; Time Is Money; Vendor Vignette; Tools Every Paperhanger Needs; How to Remove Muslin

The Wallcovering Installers Association developed Wallcovering University to provide wallcovering installers with professional online training in the techniques and art of wallcoverings. Class completion contributes to WIA certification credentials which inform current and potential clients of an installer's competence and dedication to continued learning and improvement in the trade. ■





Wallcovering  
Installers  
Association

## New Members

December 2020 – March 2021

### Installers:

Renovart Ltd  
Dorian Burcus-Coman,  
Middlesex, UK

Better Than Paint  
Rebeca Trujillo, Wilmington,  
NC

GerGroupInc  
Stanislav Gershman, Del-  
ray Beach, FL

Pete's Paperhanging & Re-  
moval  
Peter Herrish, Canoga  
Park, CA

Stuck Up Wallpaper  
Robin Jerome, Daily City,  
CA

Titans NW  
Arlo Murphy, Gresham, OR

Wallcoverings by Theresa  
Theresa Sabus, Benning-  
ton, NE

Walls to Floors, Inc.  
Gene Sanson, Woodland  
Park, NJ

Wallcoverings By Don Dye  
Donald Dye, Sugar Land,  
TX

LH Wallpapering  
Laura Hatala, Aldie, VA

Texas Best Wallpaper  
Blake McCray, Houston, TX

Muse Wallcovering  
Devin Borland, Los Ange-  
les, CA

Victor Cali Wallcovering  
Victor Cali, Medford, MA

Painters District Council 14  
Helen Chung, Brookfield, IL

James Frye Wallcovering  
LLC  
James Frye, Orlando, FL

Ultra Painting  
Charles Lella, Hauppauge,  
NY

Paul N Inc  
Paul Narvaez, Shirley, NY

### Associate Members:

Innovations in Wallcover-  
ings  
Jennifer Dombkowski, New  
York, NY

The Paint Store Online

Verne Manson, West Hills,  
CA

## NATIONAL ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

When you have a choice of vendors,  
remember to use WIA Associate  
Members first.

Advance Equipment  
Manufacturing Company

Anstey Wallpaper Company

Bradbury & Bradbury Art  
Wallpapers, Inc.

Cavalier Wall Liner

Designtex Group (The)  
Experience49

Fidelity Wallcovering, Inc.

Gardner-Gibson, Inc.

Len-Tex Wallcoverings

Maya Romanoff Corporation

MDC Wallcoverings

MISH, Inc

Mutoh

Painters & Allied Trades LMCI

Phillip Jeffries Ltd.

R37 Inc.

Real Wood Veneer Wallcovering

Roman Decorating Products LLC

Roos International, Ltd.  
Wallcovering

Steve's Blinds & Wallpaper, LLC

Studio Zen Wallcoverings

The Paint Store Online

Thibaut Wallcovering

Vahallan Papers

Versa Design Surfaces

Wallpaper Direct

Wallpaper Warehouse

Williamson College of the Trades

Wolf-Gordon, Inc.

York Wallcoverings, Inc.