

COVID-19 News Briefs

E-signatures now accepted for surety bonds. The United States General Services Administration (GSA) recently issued an order allowing vendors and sureties to use electronic signatures in lieu of manual signatures and eliminating the requirement for any seals on the surety bonds.

“It’s imperative that public officials immediately issue these orders in their jurisdictions to allow work on critical projects to begin and continue, while maintaining important protections for construction firms, workers and taxpayers,” said Mark McCallum, CEO of National Association of Surety Bond Producers (NASBP), in the press release.

Architects see major slowdown in new design work. This important leading indicator for the construction industry is pointing in the wrong direction, according to a recent survey by the American Institute of Architects (AIA). The survey found 50% of architecture firms reported fewer new design projects for March, as compared to their expectations entering the month.

In terms of work on active projects, the overwhelming majority of architecture firms (83%) are anticipating a decline in revenue for March relative to their expectations heading into the month, with over a third of firms estimating that their revenue will be at least -10% below expectations. This situation is anticipated to worsen in April, with 94% of firms expecting revenue declines, and 57% anticipating their revenue falloff will exceed -10%.

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Fastenal Co. Buys Stake in Apex — Its Provider of Industrial Vending Machines

Fastenal Co., Winona, MN, purchased certain assets of Apex Industrial Technologies on March 30, according to an 8K filed by the company.

Over the past 12 years, Apex has provided Fastenal with thousands of industrial vending machines, and the distributor is generally considered to be the leader in the use of this on-site sales tool at industrial and commercial locations. According to the 8K, since 2008, Fastenal bought “more than 105,000 product dispensing and leased devices across 23 device types in 25 countries. These devices generated more than \$1.1 billion in sales in 2019.”

Fastenal’s installed base of industrial vending machines has always been a bit mind-blowing, but according to the latest available financial information on its website, it has aggressive goals to install even more vending machines. Before the COVID-19 crisis, Fastenal set a goal

of signing on 22,000 to 24,000 vending machines.

However, the downturn in business has had an impact. “We signed 4,798 industrial vending devices during the first quarter of 2020,” the company said in its 1Q 2020 earnings report. “Our installed device count on March 31, was 92,124, an increase of 10.4% over March 31, 2019,” “Daily sales through our vending devices grew at a low double-digit pace in the first quarter of 2020 over the first quarter of 2019 due to the increase in the installed base. These device counts do not include slightly more than 15,000 vending devices deployed as part of our lease locker program.

“With business activity slowing further, many customers closed and operating below capacity, and our own efforts to source critical parts for customers divert-

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DISC Corp.’s Take on Today’s Electrical Economy — Bruised But Still Standing

Truly a black swan event of epic proportion is upon the entire world. The need for mandated social distancing measures has halted a large portion of the global economy. This is compounded by a contraction in oil prices deepened by a lack of demand. Massive layoffs and sharp contractions in financial markets are undermining personal wealth. Unprecedented drops in demand for goods and services may instigate the largest drop in domestic GDP ever.

These events carry longer-lasting implications for recovery. That said, the electrical community is deemed, as it should be, an essential business. We have weathered downturns before and will again. The top chart on page 2 shows the downturn and recovery cycles of 2002 and 2009 as well as the current DISC forecast for this 2020 cycle. The bars in the charts below represent dollars of sales and the

line is year-over-year (YOY) percentage of increase/decrease.

DISC’s base forecast for 2020-2023.

The current forecast is to return to pre-pandemic levels by 2023 (equivalent sales dollars to 2019). The current but changing expectation for the overall electrical distribution market is to finish 2020 down -19.6% below 2019 year-over-year results. As stated in our last update, we expected further downward revisions as we continued to gather data. Our last forecast as of late March was -12.4% YOY.

As of now, the expectation for beginning the recovery cycle is in 2021 with a YOY increase of +3.9%. We are forecasting stronger acceleration in YOY growth of +11.4% in 2022. The 2023 forecast of +5.4% growth puts us in reach of 2019 sales.

Contractor.

The revised Contractor *Continued on page 2*

DISC Forecast Says Market Will Get Mauled in 2020 But Sees +3.9% Increase in 2021

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Sector forecast is down -24.8% YOY for 2020 with the bulk of the downturn falling in 2020 Q3 and Q4, as construction markets tend to lag other markets. However, stay-at-home, social distancing and construction stoppages will heavily impact Q2 results, followed by steeper declines later this year and into the start of 2021. The forecast for 2021 is down overall -1%, followed by 2022 growth of +19.1%.

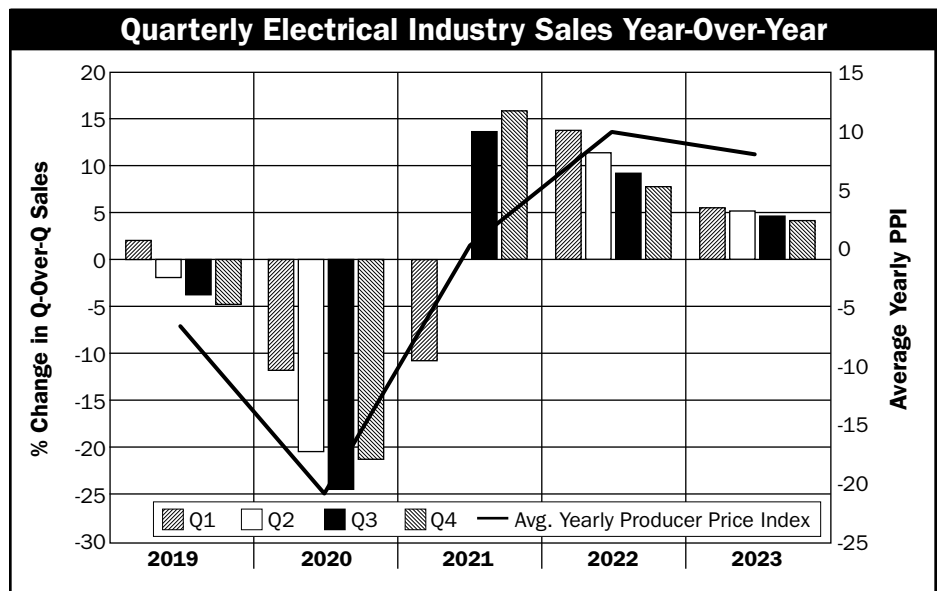
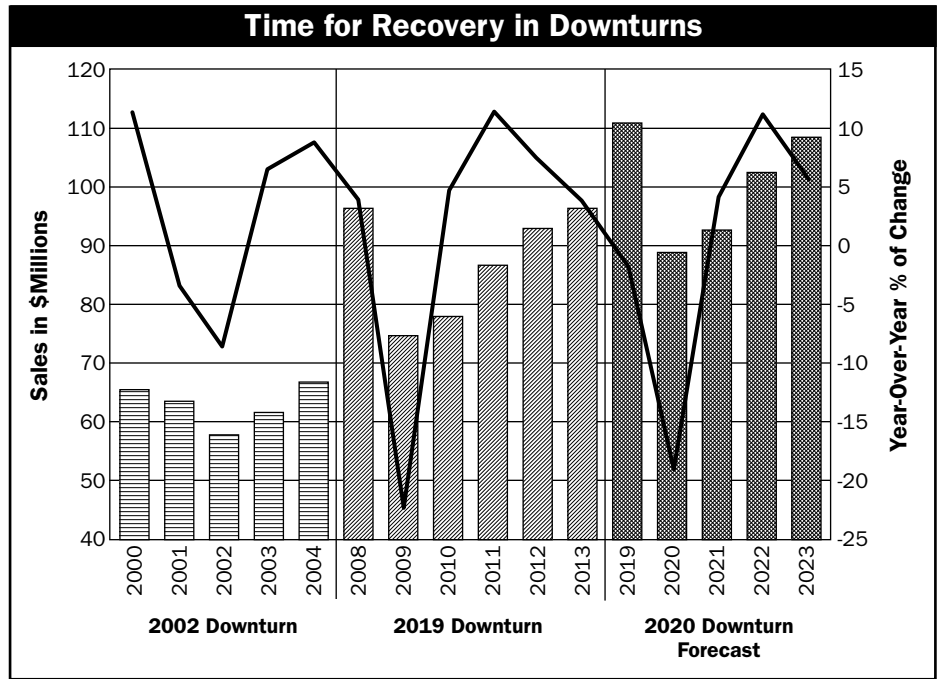
Industrial. The revised Industrial Sector forecast for 2020 is to be down -20.7%. Supply chain disruptions, factory closures and a drop in demand for goods and services due to illness and social distancing measures will continue to drag recovery through the year. We forecast a return to +5.7% growth in 2021 as government intervention with rate cuts and other aggressive fiscal policy measures start to positively impact the sector. In 2022, growth will climb to +6.3%.

Institutional. The revised Institutional Sector forecast is down -10.9% for 2020, with a return to growth of +6.9% in 2021 and +5.5% in 2022. A unique opportunity for construction in educational and other normally highly populated facilities currently exists, as closures allow for less restricted access to complete improvements and upgrades.

Utility. The revised Utility Sector forecast is down -9% in 2020, up +1.5% in 2021, followed by a +5.4% increase in 2022.

DISC's current 2020 quarterly forecasts. The COVID-19 pandemic will continue to negatively and unpredictably pressure results through the balance of the year. Expect these forecasts to be revised in the weeks ahead. We currently anticipate a measured and slow market rebound beginning in 2021 with a return to positive results mid-year 2021 and recovery to pre-pandemic market levels in 2023.

If you need more current detailed



information by sector, economic indicators, and the drivers of economic activity focused on the electrical distribution community, contact me about purchasing the

DISC Monthly Flash report. My contact information (346) 339-7528/ chris@disc-corp.com / www.disc-corp.com.—Christian Sokoll, president, DISC Corp.

Fastenal Buys Supplier of Vending Machines

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ing energy from growth driver signings, visibility for signings has become limited.

Fastenal said in its 8K that Apex created and developed the software, designed the equipment, and built the vending equipment supply chain, while it brought industry expertise, presence in the marketplace and a willingness to bring the

platform to market.

Fastenal's President and Chief Executive Officer, Dan Florness, said in the 8K, "Fastenal's founder, Bob Kierlin, conceived of industrial vending at the company's inception in 1967. Our relationship with Apex Industrial Technologies in 2008 helped to make the industrial vending solution scalable. This transaction allows

both organizations to move forward with their unique strategic plans while still providing an avenue for additional collaboration.

"In connection with this transaction, Fastenal purchased a perpetual and unfettered use of key patents, designs, software and licenses, as well as direct access to the supply chain."

City Electric Supply Branches in South Carolina & Georgia Support Telecom Businesses During COVID-19 Outbreak

During the coronavirus pandemic, City Electric Supply (CES) has discovered an opportunity to support wireless infrastructure by providing support and materials to wireless and telecom businesses, as millions of Americans have made the move to working from home. CES Gaffney in South Carolina and CES Toccoa in Georgia are stocking up on specialized products to help supply their new and existing telecom customers.

“Cable, distribution equipment, grounding and bonding conductors, these aren’t things that every branch keeps on hand,” said Spartanburg District Manager Don Corbett in the press release. “It’s a very specific set of products, but where we are, it’s in demand because so many people are working from home. Keeping specialized supplies like this stocked is crucial for our partnership with essential businesses. They need solutions fast, and we’re proud to provide them.”

CES has served wireless telecom contractors in the Southeast region since 2005 by providing products for power distribution, grounding, conduit systems and

more. Providing additional products for the telecom and wireless market has required taking on new suppliers. While CES has existing relationships with companies like Eaton, Priority Wire, Queen City Conduit and TAMCO fittings to support its C&I partners, the telecom business required some more specialized products and services, CES Public Relations Specialist Janan Buisier said in an e-mail to *Electrical Marketing*. For example, they added Harger Grounding to provide exothermic products.

Maintaining wireless networks is not an easy task, and it includes but is not limited to everyday maintenance and construction of new cell towers for companies such as AT&T, Verizon and others. As essential businesses, telecom companies approached CES worried about getting the necessary materials to keep cell towers and network structures running.

“We assured them of our essential status and that we were prepared to help them with anything on a daily basis,” Corbett said in the release.

CES’s support system includes staying fully stocked with necessary materials in

order to help a customer out in the middle of the night or get products to remote sites, like mountainsides or rural areas. Right now, they are either shipping directly to customers and their job-sites or delivering shipments themselves, with their drivers often up as early as 5 a.m. to ensure products get delivered on time. Corbett adds they have had urgent orders get delivered all the way out to Tennessee from nearby branches.

“Being able to provide this level of service in a time like this is what being an essential supplier is all about,” Corbett added. “Our customers want to know that they can depend on us, and we’re never going to say we can’t do something for them if it’s possible.”

—Ellie Coggins, Associate Content Specialist

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IRCG’s Pandemic Revenue Index registers -29.4% decline. Indian River Consulting Group’s (IRCG) weekly Pandemic Revenue Index for the work week of April 6-10 indicated a -29.4% decline compared with the same week a year ago. IRCG’s distributor Pandemic Revenue Index (PRI) gives distributors a weekly quantified view into how other distributors in the industry are faring with respect to revenue declines as the global COVID-19 pandemic progresses.

“This week’s PRI Index shows a sales decline of more than 29%, which confirms that the improvement last week was an anomaly as we suspected,” said Mike Emerson, IRCG partner. “We’re hearing that there is a lot of confusion in the market right now, as distributors get conflicting messages about when the economy will ‘open up’ again. Things may become clearer in the next few weeks as to whether we’ve reached the apex, which most agree is a prerequisite for easing stay-at-home orders.”

IRCG also now offers an on-demand webinar on how businesses can design and execute a cost reduction program during the COVID-19 pandemic. The cost reduction webinar, as well as a cash-flow modeling spreadsheet and webinar, are available free on their website at ircg.com/stress-testing.

Hubbell Offers Update on COVID-19 Response

As part of an announcement on the April 30 release of its 1Q 2020 financial results, Hubbell Inc., Orange, CT, also offered insight into the strategies it’s using to combat the COVID-19 crisis and position the company for the economic recovery after the crisis passes.

Hubbell Chairman and CEO Dave Nord said in a press release, “As we consider the anticipated challenges we expect to face relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have reviewed all aspects of our business and implemented a series of cost management actions to sustain the organization through this economic uncertainty, including:

- The board of directors will forego its quarterly retainer payments for the second quarter
- Senior executives will take a 25% salary reduction in the second quarter
- All other executives will take a 15% salary reduction in the second quarter
- Salaried employees will take a 2-week furlough sometime during the second quarter
- Various other discretionary cost reduc-

tion and cash preservation actions

“Concurrent with these cost actions, we are also providing additional support to our hourly employees that manufacture the products so essential to our communities. To that end, we are paying all applicable hourly employees with additional appreciation bonus pay during the second quarter.

“To maximize our financial flexibility, the company has also drawn \$225 million of an available \$750 million on its revolving credit facility. This was a proactive measure we took to further bolster our strong liquidity position in the event that economic conditions worsen significantly.

“We are committed to ensuring we come out on the other side of this challenging period in a position of strength to meet the demands of our customers. These steps, along with reducing discretionary and non-essential spending, will help protect Hubbell’s ability to serve the critical infrastructure needs of our customers in the future. We will continue to reevaluate our next steps as the situation continues to evolve.”

Industry Events

Note to readers: COVID-19 has forced the cancellation of many key industry events for 2020. EM's editors are tracking all events and will publish updates. Below is a status report as of April 16.

April 15-16, 2020

Upper Midwest Electrical Expo

Minneapolis; North Central Electrical League, www.ncel.org

Status: Postponed with no new dates yet.

April 19-23, 2020

NAILD Convention

Biloxi, MS; National Association of Independent Lighting Distributors, www.naild.org; **Status:** Postponed with no new dates yet.

April 21-24, 2020

AHTD Spring Meeting

Scottsdale, AZ; Association for High Technology Distribution, www.ahtd.org; **Status:** Postponed with Fall Meeting scheduled for Oct. 14-Oct. 17 in Salt Lake City

April 28, 2020

Electric League Expo 2020

Kansas City, MO; Electric League of Missouri & Kansas, www.electricleague.org; **Status:** Postponed until March 30, 2021

May 5-7, 2020

LightFair Trade Show & Conference

Las Vegas; www.lightfair.org; **Status:** Cancelled.

May 5-8, 2020

NAED National Conference

Philadelphia; www.naed.org; **Status:** Cancelled.

June 23-26, 2020

NAED Women in Industry

San Antonio; www.naed.org; **Status:** Still scheduled as of April 2.

July 14-16, 2020

NAED Lead Conference

Minneapolis; www.naed.org; **Status:** Still scheduled as of April 2.

Oct. 4-6, 2020

NECA Trade Show & Conference

Chicago; National Electrical Contractors Association, www.necashow.org; **Status:** Still scheduled as of April 2.

March Single-Family Housing Starts Get Hammered with -17.5% Decline

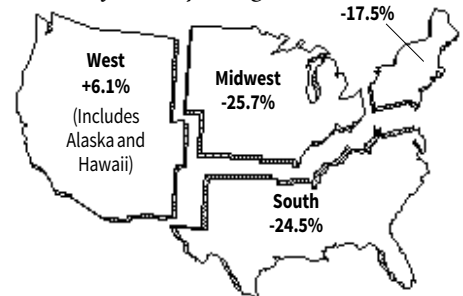
Housing starts in March were at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1,216,000, -22.3% below the revised February estimate of 1,564,000, and +1.4% above the March 2019 rate of 1,199,000. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, single-family housing starts in March were at a rate of 856,000, -17.5% below the revised February figure of 1,037,000.

Building permits. Privately-owned housing units authorized by building permits in March were at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1,353,000, -6.8% below the revised February rate of 1,452,000, but +5% above the March 2019 rate of 1,288,000. Single-family authorizations

in March were at a rate of 884,000, -12% below the revised February figure of 1,005,000.

Housing Starts by Region

(% of monthly change)



New Privately Owned Housing Units Started

(Thousands of units, seasonally adjusted annual rate)

Period	Total	1 Unit	5 Units or more	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Mar. 2020 ¹	1,216	856	347	52	107	454	243
Feb. 2020 ²	1,564	1,037	511	63	144	601	229
Jan. 2020 ²	1,619	992	618	65	140	519	268
Dec. 2019	1,601	1,057	524	66	164	589	238
Nov. 2019	1,381	940	422	65	111	516	248
Oct. 2019	1,340	914	414	39	117	534	224
Mar. 2019	1,199	833	361	57	102	480	194

1-Preliminary; 2-Revised; Note: Detail may not add to total because of rounding.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

EPI Registers No Change in March

Although *Electrical Marketing's* Electrical Price Index for March did not show any change on either a month-over-month or year-over-year basis with a reading of 152.2 points, several product categories registered a change of more than 1%. These companies are Power Wire & Cable (-2.1%); Conduit Fittings (+2.1%); Non-metallic conduit (+1.7%); and Switchgear (-1.2%). Lamps had the biggest YOY increase at +7.8%

Note: All EPI series represent Global Insight aggregates of Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) producer price indices (PPIs). The revised data partly reflect redefinitions of specific PPIs by the BLS, but mostly reflect the rebenchmarking of all EPI price series to a 1997 base year. The four following EPI series have been affected by BLS redefinitions: boxes, conduit (fittings), nonmetallic conduit, and generators. Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; Global Insight

Electrical Price Index — March 2020

1997=100	March 2020	Feb. 2019	Mar 2019	% Change 1 Mo.	% Change 1 Yr.
Building Wire & Cable	180.2	180.7	185.4	-0.2	-2.8
Power Wire & Cable	208.3	212.8	214.9	-2.1	-3.0
Telephone	171.6	173.0	180.9	-0.8	-5.1
Hand & Power Tools	141.6	141.6	139.6	0.0	1.4
Elec. Heating Equip.	146.6	145.8	141.7	0.6	3.5
Residential Lighting	151.6	150.9	141.0	0.4	7.5
Industrial Fixtures	142.5	142.6	138.3	-0.1	3.0
Fans & Blowers	166.6	167.5	165.4	-0.5	0.8
Wiring Devices & Connectors	134.6	134.9	134.3	-0.2	0.2
Pole Line Hardware	166.0	165.5	164.5	0.3	0.9
Boxes	175.3	174.6	170.5	0.4	2.8
Conduit Fittings	161.1	157.9	159.2	2.1	1.2
Metal Conduit	184.6	184.7	183.1	0.0	0.8
Nonmetallic Conduit	165.3	162.6	162.5	1.7	1.7
Motors	163.7	163.7	163.5	0.0	0.1
Generators	153.6	154.5	152.8	-0.6	0.5
Ballasts	152.1	152.1	153.0	0.0	-0.6
Elect. Meas. & Integ. Inst.	127.9	129.1	127.9	-0.9	0.0
Transformers	138.9	138.8	136.7	0.1	1.6
Panelboards & Switches	170.9	171.5	171.2	-0.4	-0.2
Circuit Breakers	180.0	179.2	177.2	0.4	1.6
Switchgear	169.5	171.6	167.8	-1.2	1.0
Fuses	161.1	161.5	157.9	-0.2	2.0
Industrial Controls	164.1	163.7	161.8	0.2	1.4
Lamps	154.6	154.6	143.4	0.0	7.8
Appliances	113.1	113.1	112.1	0.0	0.9
Air Conditioners	148.5	148.3	150.4	0.1	-1.3
Fasteners	158.0	157.9	154.5	0.1	2.3
Total Index	152.2	152.2	152.1	0.0	0.0

Electrical Marketing's Leading Economic Indicators

Freight rail traffic continues dramatic decline. The Association of American Railroads (AAR) reported that for the week ending April 4, total U.S. weekly rail traffic was 429,095 carloads and intermodal units, down -15.9% compared with the same week last year. Total carloads for the week ending April 4 were 210,911 carloads, down -16.2% compared with the same week in 2019, while U.S. weekly intermodal volume was 218,184 containers and trailers, down -15.7% compared to 2019.

“The impact of the novel coronavirus on railroads is growing,” said AAR Senior Vice President John Gray, in the press release. “Part of the problem now is sustained weakness in coal carloads, but even excluding coal, carloads last week were down -13.1%. We haven’t seen sustained declines of that magnitude since the Great Recession.

“Intermodal volume last week was down -15.7% over last year,” Gray added. “With China in the very early stages of its own recovery, whether intermodal volumes will continue to fall — and if they do continue to fall, how far — will now depend to a large extent on what happens with consumer spending in North America.

March construction data is in but doesn’t yet reflect full impact of COVID-19. On the surface a -5% monthly drop in total construction start data published this week by Dodge Data & Analytics doesn’t sound all that awful, but Richard Branch, the company’s chief economist, says the April data will be a more accurate reflection of the impact of the crisis on the construction market.

“Considering the calamity that occurred towards the end of March as the fallout from the COVID-19 coronavirus hit the economy, construction starts held up rather well,” said Branch in the press release. “Construction starts in March were unlikely to be greatly impacted as projects that broke ground during

the month likely had materials sourced and in-place and labor booked well ahead of the scheduled groundbreaking. That momentum and planning is difficult to reverse at the last

minute. Additionally, most of the stay-at-home orders and construction moratoriums were not instituted until the last week of the month and
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The Marketplace : Key Figures

	Month	Latest month	Previous month	Month-over-month % change	Year ago	Year-over-year % change	2019 annual
CONSTRUCTION							
New Construction Put in Place (billions of dollars, SAAR) ²							
Total	FEB	1366.7	1384.49	-1.3	1288.95	6	1306.96
Offices	FEB	68.23	68.66	-0.6	67.83	0.6	68.52
Industrial	FEB	72.93	76.1	-4.2	75.03	-2.8	73.93
Housing Starts (Thousands of units, SAAR) ²							
Total	MAR	1216	1564	-22.3	1199	1.4	1298
Single-unit	MAR	856	1037	-17.5	833	2.8	894
Mobile Home Shipments ³ (thousands of units, SAAR)	Jan	106	100	6	92	15.2	95
Employment, Construction Workers (thousands) ⁴	MAR	7331	7271	0.8	7170	2.2	7492
Employment, Electrical Contractors (thousands) ⁴	FEB	974.6	970.3	0.4	941.3	3.5	970.2
Hourly Wage, Electrical Contractors ⁴	FEB	30.88	30.77	0.4	30.12	2.5	30.66
PRODUCTION							
Industrial Production Index (1967=100) ⁵	MAR	103.7	109.6	-5.4	109.7	-5.5	109.5
Construction Supplies Production Index ⁵ (1977=100-SA)	MAR	111.9	118.8	-5.8	116.1	-3.6	116.5
Employment in Electrical Equipment & Supplies Mfg. Production workers (Thousands) ⁴							
Weekly hours	FEB	145.8	146.2	-0.3	144.9	0.6	146.9
Hourly wage	FEB	42.8	43	-0.5	43.2	-0.9	42.8
Electric Power Output Index (1967=100) ⁵	FEB	20.61	20.12	2.4	20.83	-1.1	20.1
Machine Tool Orders* (millions of dollars) ⁶	MAR	99.2	103.1	-3.8	104.7	-5.2	102.7
Industrial Capacity Utilization (percent, SA) ¹	FEB	269.72	262.49	2.8	324.83	-1.7	367.57
MAR	70.27	75.01	-6.3	76.16	-7.7	75.57	
TRADE							
Electrical Mfrs' Shipments	FEB	3,111	3,073	1.2	3,075	1.2	3,121
Electrical Mfrs' Inventories (millions of dollars, SA) ²	FEB	5,735	5,769	-0.6	5,697	0.7	5,729
Electrical Mfrs' Inventory-to-Shipments Ratio	FEB	1,843	1,877	-1.8	1,853	-0.5	1,836
Electrical Mfrs' New Orders (millions of dollars, SA) ²	FEB	3,111	3,108	0.1	3,121	-0.3	3,128
Electrical Mfrs' Unfilled Orders (millions of dollars, SA) ²	FEB	7,907	7,872	0.4	7,911	-0.1	7,948
Exports, Electrical Machinery (f.a.s. value in millions of dollars) ²	FEB	6,624	6,546	1.2	6,388	3.7	79,350
U.S. Dollar vs. Other Major Currencies (1973=100) ¹⁵	MAR	111.89	107.73	3.9	106.31	5.2	107.06
PRICES & INTEREST RATES							
Industrial Commodities Wholesale Price Index (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1967=100)	MAR	193.7	196.8	-1.6	202.2	-4.2	200.7
Electrical Price Index (Electrical Marketing, 1997=100)	MAR	152.2	152.2	0	152.1	0	152.2
Construction Materials Wholesale Price Index (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1982=100)	MAR	253.9	252.6	0.5	251.2	1.1	251.3
Copper Prices (Metals Week, cents per pound)	MAR	236.61	258.36	-8.4	289.97	-18.4	272.25
Prime Rate ⁵	MAR	3.78	4.75	-20.4	5.5	-31.3	5.28
Federal Funds Rate ⁵	MAR	0.65	1.58	-58.9	2.41	-73	2.16
Mortgage Rate ⁷	MAR	3.45	3.47	-0.4	4.28	-19.4	3.94

Sources: ¹McGraw-Hill Construction/Dodge; ²Dept. of Commerce; ³Manufactured Housing Institute; ⁴Dept. of Labor;

⁵Federal Reserve Board; ⁶The Association for Manufacturing Technology; ⁷Federal Home Loan Bank Board.

Note: Some figures shown—prime rate, for example—are averaged for month. NYA—not yet available SA—seasonally adjusted. SAAR—seasonally adjusted annual rate. Source for chart: Global Insight.

For further information about construction starts, please contact Dodge Analytics at 1-800-591-4462

People

Hunt Electric Supply (Burlington, NC): The company announced the promotions of **Sean Satzman**, **Jon Sutton** and **Eric May**. Satzman was promoted from assistant branch manager to branch manager at the Carrboro/Chapel Hill location, replacing Tim Aldridge, who retired earlier this year. Satzman has been with Hunt Electric Supply since 2003. Sutton was promoted to corporate purchasing administration from inside sales at the Burlington branch and has been with the company since 2006. May was promoted from inside sales to sales manager of the Greensboro branch. Prior to coming to Hunt Electric Supply in 2014, he served as a journeyman electrician.

Warshauer Electric Supply (Tinton Falls, NJ): **Ron Vilardi** joined the company as a salesperson. He previously worked at Greenlee Tools/Emerson for 2.5 years as an account manager in New York and New Jersey. Vilardi graduated from Susquehanna University with a business degree and a finance emphasis.

Cerrowire (Hartselle, AL): **Mercy Ebue-tse** joined the company as a procurement specialist in the company's plant in Ogden, UT. Before moving to the United States to pursue her master's degree, she worked in her native Nigeria as a quality engineer for the Federal Ministry of Works and Transport and as a project engineer for the Julius Berger construction company.

Universal Lighting Technologies (Nashville, TN): **Steve DeBlasi** joined the company as director of distribution sales in the western United States and western Canada. In his new role, he will work to expand the channel and support growth of Universal's LED lighting solutions.

During his 30-plus-year career, he has worked closely with OEMs (original equipment manufacturers), consulting engineers, architects, distributors, agents and end users. In his past roles, DeBlasi has opened new markets, developed chain and distributor branch partners and worked with buying groups and key accounts. Prior to joining Universal, he served as VP of sales and marketing, business development manager and as a regional sales manager in the lighting industry.

Hill Electric (Anderson, SC): The company recently hired **Angela Gardner** for the newly created position of director of business development and marketing.

Gardner brings to the company nearly three decades of both industry-specific experiences in construction, engineering, and architecture, and experience in marketing and business development. Her role within Hill Electric includes representing the company in the community and building its brand. Hill Electric is an industrial electrical contractor providing installations of manufacturing process and auxiliary equipment for companies across upstate South Carolina.

National Electrical Contractor Association (NECA) (Bethesda, MD): **David Long**, NECA's chief executive officer, is one of the construction industry executives recently asked by the White House to participate in its new Great American Economic Revival Industry Groups, which were formed to help the nation through the COVID-19 crisis. **Dirk Van Dongen**, president of the National Association of Wholesaler-Distributors and **David Farr**, chairman and chief executive officer of Emerson Electric, are two other familiar industry names participating in the groups. Construction industry executives asked to participate include **Jerry Howard**, chief executive officer of the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB); **Michael Bellaman**, president and chief executive officer of Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC); and **Stephen Sandherr**, chief executive officer, Associated General Contractors (AGC).

Leading Indicators

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into April. Therefore, April construction starts are likely to be a very different story with states like New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania among others banning construction activity. April's starts data will be the first true indication of how the crisis will impact the construction industry."

The Dodge press release said total construction starts declined -5% from February to March to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of \$746.9 billion. According to Dodge. Volatility caused by the presence or absence of large projects in healthcare and the utility/gas plant category, however, skewed the analysis. In March, nonresidential building starts fell -9% from February (seasonally adjusted), while residential building dropped -11%.

Rep News

DeFazio Industries, a five-year-old independent manufacturers' rep serving the Mid-Atlantic region, announced a new partnership with Howard Lighting to represent its complete line of fixtures, lamps and ballasts. The majority of the Howard line of LED fixtures meet the latest DLC requirements and are made in the United States.

DeFazio Industries also represents ACS-Unifab, AFC Cable Systems, Allied Tube & Conduit, Cerrowire, Cope Cable Tray, General Cable, Konkore Fittings, Littelfuse, Orbit Industries, Powerstrut, Prysmian Group, Sourcing Wire & Cable and Unistrut.

PLP SoCal, a 33-year-old lighting rep with offices located in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Santa Barbara, CA, recently took on the Alva Lighting and Auberge lines. The company is a full-service sales agency representing manufacturers in lighting, controls, shading systems, fans, handrails and site furnishings. Its core markets include commercial, institutional, retail, hospitality and residential environments.

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