

Recommendations for Covid-19 Auction Operations in State of Maine
Maine Auctioneers Association

The auction business is a unique industry that is hard to pigeonhole as it involves various processes that can be seen as retail, moving and storage, and holding events. The industry breaks down into various specialties (products being auctioned) such as estates and household personal property, antiques, fine art, firearms, real estate, charity benefits and farm/construction equipment and livestock. Depending on the specialty, the actual auction itself may have differences and specific processes distinct from auctions in other specialties, but there are commonalities that generally apply to all.

The auction process breaks down into several steps, each of which requires specific details as to covid-safe practices. The auction steps are:

1. Prospecting/engaging clients (sellers)
2. Cataloging sale and contracting with sellers
3. Preview/inspection of inventory by buyers
4. Auction day
5. Removal/pick-up/shipping of inventory
6. Settlement with sellers

Also, there are general office/staff practices to be performed in the administration of all six steps.

1. **Prospecting/engaging clients (sellers).** In prospecting new business and clients, auctioneers are encouraged to have clients send photos, images or details of prospective inventory via electronic, mail or telephonic means if at all possible. For onsite meetings to review and inspect inventories, these should be one-on-one or with a minimum of staff, practicing social distancing and wearing proper protective gear.
2. **Cataloging sale and contracting with sellers.** When collecting inventory, a minimum of staff and contact with the seller should be practiced, with wearing protective gear and social distancing when appropriate. Sellers should be encouraged to not have contact with any of the inventory for several days before collection if possible, and inventory should remain untouched for several days after being moved to auction premises, if possible. Staff should wash or sterilize hands immediately after touching any inventory. Contracts should be executed via electronic means as much as possible, and the use of docusign or other remote execution processes be used. If this is not possible, social distancing and wearing protective gear should be practiced by both parties and each should use their own writing instrument. Staff should wash or sterilize their hands afterwards.
3. **Preview/inspection of inventory by buyers.** If previews and inspection of inventory by buyers cannot be conducted online through video/image representation, they should be conducted by appointment/reservation if possible, to limit and spread the flow of prospective bidders at any one time. If this is not possible, previews should be held similarly to grocery stores, with distancing practiced in queuing and lines, entrance to auction premises done in an orderly way with control over number of previewers at any one time, and with one-way, directional flow through the preview and, if possible, exiting a door other than the entrance. Limits should be placed on the ability of prospective bidders physically handling items, which should be discouraged, and only done with such measures as requiring the bidder to sanitize their hands

first, and to sanitize the handled item afterwards. Social distancing and wearing protective gear where appropriate should be practiced, and covid guidelines should be posted in a publicly viewable area. Any person displaying symptoms, including coughing, sneezing, fever, etc., whether staff or viewers, should not be allowed on premises and be advised to seek medical attention.

4. **Auction day.** While some auction houses in the State have online capabilities, many in the industry do not and require live audience auctions to conduct business. This is the most vulnerable in the auction process to covid/safety concerns. However, this is one of the most benign gatherings of people that can be accomplished. The audience can be assembled, seated, and exited using social distancing practices, and can further protect the audience by wearing personal protective equipment. Staff should social distance, not share computers, equipment or microphones, etc, or they should be sterilized in between uses. The facility should be cleaned/sterilized before use, and toilets should be regularly cleaned/sterilized between uses. Personal protective equipment and sterilization materials should be worn by staff and made available to bidders. Payment by buyers should be performed using remote or electronic means as much as possible, but if necessary, by practicing social distancing in the line to the cashier and with the cashier wearing personal protective equipment and washing or sterilizing their hands in between payments. Social distancing and wearing protective gear where appropriate should be practiced, and covid guidelines should be posted in a publicly viewable area. Any person displaying symptoms, including coughing, sneezing, fever, etc., whether staff or bidders, should not be allowed on premises and be advised to seek medical attention.

Toilets are subject to specific cleaning/sterilization guidelines that can be found on the DECD website. Other concerns are bunching around the bathroom or other areas, which should be discouraged and safe-distancing should be practiced for bathroom lines along all other lines of people in the auction process.

Features that make live audiences safer than many, if not most, than other gatherings of people include:

- The only person who is generally required to speak is the auctioneer/bid caller, who normally used a microphone. So unlike religious services or choir practices, etc, there is no necessity of singing, yelling, or even talking. Bidding can be done by gesture or raising a card.
- Unlike religious services, there is no necessity of physical touching, so auctions do not require shaking hands, embracing, etc. Bidders, staff and auctioneers can all maintain social distancing throughout the auction.
- There is no necessity of commonly touching or passing items among the audience, so unlike restaurants, there is no serving of food, dishes or cutlery or staff mixing among or going back and forth between other staff and other customers.
- The bidders generally are required to register, so the identities of attendees can be procured if there is suspicion of an outbreak or the need to contact trace.

While the State large gathering guidelines limit gatherings to a 50 person maximum, this does not include staff, which may be extra, and there is flexibility, including splitting up the gathering between rooms (with different HVAC systems), buildings, or a combination of inside and outside.

5. **Removal/pick-up/shipping of inventory.** Shipping by the auctioneer is the ideal way to disburse items post-auction, but if this is not possible, removal/pick up of items should be done with a minimum of people and by practicing social distancing and wearing personal protective equipment where appropriate. Auctioneers should require scheduling or appointments for a more orderly process and that prevents multiple people showing up at one time. Staff should practice CDC guidelines and wash or sterilize hands between touching each item, not touch their eyes, nose, mouth or face, wear personal protective equipment and refrain from coughing or sneezing near or on the inventory and use either a tissue or the inside of their elbow.
6. **Settlement with sellers.** As much as possible, settlement with sellers should be done electronically, via mail or with a courier service. If this is not possible, payments or checks should be given to sellers with a minimum of handling, by washing or sterilizing hands in between sellers and by practicing social distancing and wearing personal protective equipment when possible.
7. **General business operations.** In general business/office operations, auction businesses should practice CDC guidelines involving washing hands, use of personal protective equipment, not share computers, work stations or other equipment, regularly clean and sterilize toilets and commonly touched objects (door knobs, security key pads, etc) and to have these guideline posted in the place of business. Further, have guidelines posted at personal contact points with customers (front desk, loading dock, etc) and have those points physically restricted as much as possible. Business should be conducted electronically as much as possible and any physical contact with customers kept to a minimum, with a minimum of people as possible involved (staff and customers), and with social distancing and the wearing of personal protective equipment practices where appropriate. Staff should practice CDC guidelines and wash or sterilize hands often or after touching commonly touched objects, try to not touch their eyes, nose, mouth or face, wear personal protective equipment and refrain from coughing or sneezing near or on the inventory and use either a tissue or the inside of their elbow. Staff should be informed not to come to work if they are displaying symptoms, including coughing, sneezing, fever, etc., and be advised to seek medical attention.