

# Coping with the COVID-19 pandemic

Interview with  
**David Zrost**

Head of Group  
Corporate Security



## Keeping colleagues and customers safe

In the midst of the global pandemic, David Zrost, Head of ANDRITZ Group Corporate Security, spoke with Hydro News about measures being taken to ensure the safety of ANDRITZ customers and employees at international construction sites.

**“We have never had a situation like this. It is a first for everyone – governments, companies, and individuals.”**

While the number of infected people and death toll unfortunately continues to rise, reducing the social and economic disruption for regions, countries and communities is vital. The priority now is to ensure safety of people, while ensuring the reliable operation of assets and on-going manufacturing and installation works at the many active construction sites located around the world. Supporting the safe continuation of critical on-site activities ensures that the associated economic fallout from the pandemic is also minimized.

Mr. Zrost, you are responsible for measures to protect employees on business trips and assignments abroad. Extreme events such as terrorist attacks, natural disasters and epidemics are a part of your day-to-day work. What was different this time?

During routine situation monitoring, in January 2020 we noted the first COVID-19 cases in China. The country very quickly implemented medical countermeasures and closed its borders. A feeling of uncertainty set in. What made this situation different was the global scope, the speed of developments and the simultaneous action many countries took. National borders and air space were closed, people were put into quarantine and whole nations in lockdown. As a result, there was hardly any time to start emergency protocols, not to mention work through them step by step. Solutions had to be found under difficult and even unique conditions, such as lockdown. All this was accompanied by a constant global flood of information, with pictures of medics in hazmat suits, patients in intensive care, and diagrams that tried to explain what was happening. The emphasis lies on the word “tried”. We have never had a situation like this in living memory. It was a first for everyone – governments, companies, and individuals.



What were your biggest challenges and main tasks during the crisis?

With the speed of development and the flood of information, the biggest challenge for Corporate Security is effectively keeping track of the global situation at all times. This means constantly addressing questions like where are our colleagues, what is the status of client projects, how is the COVID-19 situation developing in each active location, and what is the status of any local countermeasures like quarantines or travel restrictions? In collaboration with the Hydro IT department, we quickly developed a dashboard that aggregates data from different verified sources. This gives us a daily situation update and based on this platform we can analyze the situation and take appropriate action to keep our colleagues and customers safe.

Our top priority is safety, even while continuing to execute projects where possible. Working with Group Site Installation and Group Quality we put together a catalogue of measures ranging from specific hygiene and social distancing measures, up-to more sophisticated digital solutions like using remote quality and safety checks. At the same time, we defined the parameters that established when we would start evacuating our

## ABOUT:

**David Zrost:** Master in Natural Sciences, Master in International Relations (majoring in International Security), 15+ years of experience in risk management. Working at ANDRITZ since 2013.

**Group Security:** Supports employees and global business operations in navigating the travel and project security risk landscape when doing business worldwide. The overall objective is to ensure that projects successfully go ahead with as little disruption as possible and our people return home safe and sound.



people. Luckily, this has only been necessary in a very few cases so far. In most countries, projects were able to continue with these additional measures in place. In countries where there were travel restrictions but no immediate threats and non-availability of commercial flights, special entry permissions were organized, for example in Belarus, Germany, Ghana, New Zealand and Turkey. At the height of restrictions, commercial flights to most countries were not available. Thus, we organized privately chartered aircrafts for some of our technicians to reach our customers' respective project sites (see also Kpong, Ghana, on next page).

All these processes require an enormous amount of time and effort in terms of logistics and bureaucracy, for example sifting through entry regulations, inquiring about exemptions, contacting embassies, security and aviation service providers, and obtaining approvals for special flights. This process is made even more difficult by the fact that, even now, the relevant authorities are often overstretched and sometimes overwhelmed.

This intensive work is well worth the effort though, as it demonstrates to our customers and colleagues that we will not let them down, despite the many hurdles. I would also like to say a special word of thanks to my team. They provide our travelers, project managers and customers with the support needed. Continuing to work untiringly to overcome hurdle after hurdle, they make all this possible. Finally, I would like to extend my appreciation to our travelers who often have to undergo specific procedures like testing or quarantine. Their commitment is also vital to success.

Does our existing security structure hold up in this environment?

Yes. Overall, the structure of Corporate Security continues to prove its effectiveness. Thanks to our large network of medical, security, and aviation service providers, we are always able

to act positively. Our collaboration with our travel assistance provider also continues to withstand this testing environment. The company quickly set up an online pandemic website in several languages. It provided information on current developments, travel restrictions, medical analyses and training material, and also freed up capacity to brief our people before departure and in the event of evacuation of Covid-19 patients. Along with our internal procedures this helps project managers and travelers understand what is happening in their countries of interest. It has also helped to create trust, an essential quality that means our people are still willing to travel.

**"Our top priority is the safety of our customers and colleagues while continuing project execution work."**

Are there some lessons you have learned from the crisis? What is going to change?

Project and travel preparations will be different as long as there is no remedy for COVID-19. Preparation will be more detailed and take more time. In order to provide assistance here, we have defined specific COVID-19 site and travel guidelines. Nowadays, project managers are taking even more time to work through the process carefully. A sensitive evaluation of the situation and good cooperation with the customer is essential for the success of our on-site work.

On a positive note, our organization and those of our customers will probably become more resilient. ANDRITZ, for example, is moving forward in this process by means of a structured lessons-learned process. This could even present us with new opportunities to improve the process for the well-being of our staff and the benefit of our customers.







The chosen flight route of the commissioning team of HPP Kpong with stops in Serbia and Algeria until they reached their final destination.

## Commissioning works despite all difficulties – Kpong, Ghana

The finalization of the Kpong hydropower plant refurbishment project in Ghana was suddenly halted in mid-March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Unit #4 was the last part of the retrofit project to be commissioned but travel and flight restrictions prevented the ANDRITZ commissioning team from travelling to Ghana.

Nonetheless, the pressing need for electrical energy led all involved parties to seek out a solution. As a result, a special charter flight was organized to fly in the team and finalize commissioning of the last unit. Following a huge effort by the customer, the local authorities, the responsible ANDRITZ team, and Goldeck-Flug airline, on August 3, two supervisors and five commissioning engineers departed from Vienna. After picking up the commissioning coordinator in Beograd, Serbia, and after a fuel stop in Tamanrasset, Algeria, the chartered plane safely arrived at Accra. After a 10-day quarantine in a government-determined hotel, followed by a four-day stay in the isolated ANDRITZ camp, the outstanding works could be started. Commissioning, including performance tests,

were successfully completed on September 19, 2020. Now, all four units of the Kpong hydropower plant are fully operational.

The use of the chartered flight brought the project back on schedule. The customer, Volta River Authority, is very pleased that the unit is operational, and the project team is happy that the project could be finalized in a realistic time frame.

For more details about Kpong and the ceremonial inauguration, see our article on page 36.

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To put the last unit into operation for the customer, the ANDRITZ team undertook all possible measures and even organized a special flight and submitted to a 14-day-quarantine.