

# SUTRO TOWER®

connection

THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE SUTRO TOWER NEIGHBORHOOD | JULY 2020

## With Masks and Sanitizer, Work at Sutro Tower Didn't Stop

**D**uring the coronavirus lockdown, work continued at Sutro Tower, a designated essential facility that operates 24/7 as a necessary business.

"We've been adhering to the public health policies of the Mayor's Office and the San Francisco Health Department to ensure a safe environment," said Raul Velez, Sutro's vice president and chief operating officer. "Several people here – myself included – have been tested for Covid-19, but nobody has been positive."

As much work as possible has been done remotely, but construction and maintenance means workers go up Sutro Tower every day and often are working closer than 6 feet from each other. Masks are mandatory.

"We wear safety gear all the time, so adding a mask wasn't that big a deal," said Bob Santos, a tower worker from New England who is part of the crew of Best Endeavors Inc., tower specialists strengthening Sutro Tower. "It's just part of being safe."

Julio Perez, a tower worker for Best Endeavors

SEE MASKS ON PAGE 3



**Jacob Victor and Wes Dossett (top) preparing to go up the tower in full safety gear, which now includes masks for all workers**

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# Sutro Tower's New Antennas Go Live

At 1 pm on April 29, the final TV stations activated their new antennas at the top of Sutro Tower, completing the most complicated changeover in the \$18 billion nationwide project to repack television signals into a smaller part of the broadcast spectrum so wireless companies could grow.

The new antennas are transmitting on new frequencies. This change was invisible to most viewers, who receive their TV signals from satellite or cable companies, but more than a million Bay Area residents who get free TV service over-the-air needed to re-scan their televisions or converter boxes to receive the new signals. Local media alerted viewers of the requirement in advance of the change date and provided links to online re-scan instructions on the [sutrotower.com](http://sutrotower.com)



website and elsewhere.

The new antennas were installed earlier in 2020, followed by several months of connectivity work and testing before they went live. Because of the domino effect of some stations moving to frequencies previously used by other stations, the changeover was tightly coordinated following months of planning by engineers throughout the region. The first set of Sutro Tower's new antennas went live on

SEE ANTENNAS ON PAGE 4

# Emission Measurements Delayed

San Francisco's permitting process, Sutro Tower's new antennas, and the Covid-19 pandemic collided this spring, and public health concerns prevailed.

Sutro Tower's standard antenna conditions require new measurements of radio frequency emissions within two weeks of new antennas going live. Emission measurements are taken at 200 points within 1000 yards of the tower in the Midtown Terrace, Twin Peaks and Forest Knolls neighborhoods, and the report of the measurements is submitted to the city's Department of Public Health.

However, it would have violated the guidelines for social distancing to take the measurements at the time proscribed. There's a two-person emission measurement crew, plus Sutro Tower personnel, plus neighborhood liaisons and a third-party professional engineer observer, plus potential city staffers, who would have been bunched together on neighborhood streets for several hours. Also, the Planning Department's environmental assessment of the new antenna project, which preceded last year's permit approval, had concluded that post-project radio frequency emission levels would be significantly below Federal exposure limits even in worst-case scenarios.

Therefore Sutro Tower, supported by neighborhood liaisons, requested to delay the 200 Point Study. Following intervention from the Department of Public Health, the Planning Department notified Sutro Tower that the standard condition requiring emission measurements would not be enforced while San Francisco's stay-at-home rules are in effect. Sutro Tower will proceed with the measurements as soon as it is safe to do so.

# Art of Sutro Tower

Sutro Tower is a frequent subject for San Francisco artists – it's featured on everything from t-shirts to models to tattoos to paintings to photographs to napkins and even coat racks. To help support the San Francisco art community, the website [sutrotower.com](http://sutrotower.com) will soon include links to artists whose works depict the tower. Local artists interested in participating can email [artists@sutrotower.com](mailto:artists@sutrotower.com) to be included.



## Masks FROM PAGE 1

Inc. who has worked at Sutro for several years, had no complaints about wearing his mask. “My wife has asthma,” he said as he put on his safety equipment to start his workday. “Coronavirus would be very dangerous for her, so I CAN’T bring it home.”

Besides requiring face covers, anti-virus safety steps at Sutro Tower include hand sanitizing stations and dispensers throughout the property, extra custodial cleaning and disinfectant use, and limitations on visits and travel.

For some tower workers, high-level face gear is already standard equipment. A crew from Ecobay Services, which specializes in removing mechanical insulation and other materials that can be hazardous, wore full ventilation systems as they prepared to take down Sutro Tower’s outmoded transmission equipment that has been replaced. “It’s a lot more than just a mask,” said one of the workers.



### When working with potentially hazardous materials, ventilation masks replace simple masks

Some tower workers live in the Bay Area, but most come from out of state and move from tower to tower around the country and the world. When the coronavirus lockdown began in March, several Sutro crewmembers immediately went home to help their families set up for sheltering in place. “It’s been a whole new experience for all of us,” said Velez. “Like the rest of the country, we’re adapting as we go – getting the work done while staying safe.”



**Native plants on the hillside and parapets on the building enhance the view from the reservoir trail**

## A Better View for Neighborhood Hikers

**W**ork is nearly complete on the last phase of Sutro Tower’s project to spruce up its appearance for neighbors on the Summit Reservoir trail next door. The final 12 parapet sections along the Sutro building’s roof lines are framed in and ready to be installed.

Earlier this year, 72 translucent sections were installed around the building’s main rooftop, shielding antennas and other equipment from view for most hikers. The final phase is a parapet on a small, lower roof above a generator.

Separately, Sutro Tower, Inc. and the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission had signed an access agreement so Sutro gardeners could plant and maintain native trees, grasses and shrubs on the hillside shared by the two entities. Landscaping the then-barren hillside, and installing the parapets, were conditions sought by neighborhood association representatives as part of earlier permits related to erosion control measures, including other landscaping..

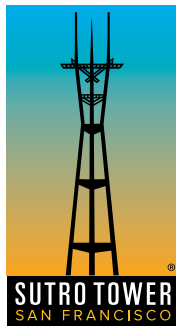
## Antennas FROM PAGE 2

March 9 and the second set seven weeks later. During the construction and testing periods, in order to keep workers safe at the top of the tower, TV stations transmitted from their auxiliary antennas lower on the tower, which affected reception for some viewers. To accommodate some final project cleanup work, some stations will broadcast from their auxiliary antennas intermittently between mid-July and mid-August.

The city's building permit for installing the new antennas requires Sutro Tower to meet a recent building code standard of withstanding winds of up to 102 miles per hour. Engineers have recommended two steps to meet the code: strengthening the tower with 50 tons of new steel, and removing the siding panels from the tower's legs to reduce wind load. The structural steel work is continuing throughout 2020, and more than half of the siding panels have been removed under a building permit to temporarily remove the panels to complete the repacking and structural improvements.

Sutro Tower's antenna change-over was spread over Phase 8 and Phase 9 of the Federal Communications Commission's three-year repack project. With almost 1,000 stations nationwide now on their new frequencies, 30% of the radio frequency spectrum previously used for TV broadcasting is now available for wireless companies, which will accommodate the growing use of wireless devices. The repack project was authorized by Congress in 2012.

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Questions? Visit [www.sutrotower.com/for-our-neighbors/](http://www.sutrotower.com/for-our-neighbors/), or contact Sutro Tower Vice President Raul Velez at 415-213-7800 or [info@sutrotower.com](mailto:info@sutrotower.com).

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Photo courtesy Western Neighborhoods Project

**T**he Western Neighborhoods Project is a San Francisco non-profit that collects and shares pictures and articles about the city's schools, stores, people and places. Their website includes a gallery of historic photos of Sutro Tower before, during and soon after construction of the present tower, including this photo of the new and original towers taken in 1972.