

Q&A WITH RUDOLF STAIGER

How Is FIG Dealing with the Coronavirus Crisis?



What impact is the coronavirus pandemic having on the geospatial industry worldwide? We asked the International Federation of Surveyors (FIG) how it is coping with the crisis. President Rudolf Staiger shares his vision on the current situation, zooms in on the cancellation of the FIG Working Week and concludes with an optimistic message for the mapping and surveying sector.

What is your business continuity plan to overcome the coronavirus challenges?

As president of the International Federation of Surveyors (FIG), I can only answer on two different levels:

The first one is the view of our members. One of the strengths of FIG is the heterogeneity of our stakeholders. Our members work in small and medium-sized private companies, but also in big private enterprises like Esri, Trimble or Leica Geosystems. In addition to this, the challenges will not only vary from country to country but will also depend on the type of products and services offered. It is therefore very difficult to talk about a general plan.

For the moment, the economy as a whole is almost standing still. Therefore, the most important task is to keep the business (in terms of contracts) alive, irrespective of the size of the enterprise! In Germany (my home country), the government is promising generous financial support, especially for small enterprises, but we all know that these promises are often too bureaucratic in reality and are seldom fast and efficient.

How is the coronavirus outbreak impacting your business?

The second level we have to look at is our federation itself. Today, we had to announce the cancellation of the FIG Working Week 2020, which was scheduled to be held in Amsterdam from 10-14 May. This is the direct impact of COVID-19. The local organizing committee and FIG are very disappointed because they had received a promising number of registrations and preparations were well underway. They evaluated a postponement to August 2020 but finally discarded this idea as it is not known what the long-term effects on international travelling will be.

What is your message to the geospatial industry now that the coronavirus has brought the world almost to a standstill?

The current situation is unique. There are no textbooks from which we can learn how to master such a crisis! For the moment, the majority of us are sitting in our 'home office' and we are all being told to avoid physical contact with our colleagues. One ideal and positive way of looking at the current situation could be to decide that now is the right time to start with a new idea, with a new project, or with a new piece of software, which we hadn't had time for until now.

It would be ideal to find the space for the development of new ideas. And, once the crisis is over, these ideas could become new products and services. I know this sounds quite simplistic but a crisis also offers opportunities!

Please bear in mind: COVID-19 is creating a totally new world of global uncertainty and unpredictability! These answers (given on 24 March) may seem strange or even totally irrelevant in the future.