



REENTRY ESSENTIALS:

Focus Areas to Support Reopening Facilities

BY JAMES JUNKIN



After months of full or partial facility closures and adaptive measures that pushed the limits of remote working, organizations across industries are turning their attention to reopening for business. For many leaders, orchestrating the return to work during an ongoing pandemic is more complex than the shutdown, especially for companies that rely on a disparate and dynamic workforce of contractors and suppliers.

Organizations must not only prepare the workplace to reduce the spread of COVID-19, but must also establish or revise infectious disease policies and adjust a host of standard operating procedures to reflect new health and safety risks — which are likely here for the long term. Employees and contractors will require awareness and procedural training for new hazards, as well as retraining and ongoing support to maintain their skills and required competencies. Employers must be able to demonstrate compliance with these new policies and additional internal and external protocols, as there will be much to plan and more that will need to be tracked and documented.

The corporate executives and facility managers charged with ramping up workplace operations are under pressure to do it right, and they know the stakes are

high: Tasks allowed to fall through the cracks and deviations from new or established procedures may expose workers to life-threatening dangers and subject companies to liabilities and lost opportunities.

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

Overseeing reopening does not need to be overwhelming but will require an organized approach to coordinate many working parts. Companies that develop a holistic plan for reentry will be better prepared to maintain safety and business continuity and positioned to ramp up with confidence and at pace.

This big-picture planning requires the organization to address two fundamental questions:

1. What new policies and procedures are in place to protect employees and contract workers from infectious diseases?

Many firms will have already taken steps to ensure a safe and healthy work environment in a new era of communicable disease risks. The company's reopening plan should document these measures and any the company intends to implement before workers return. The plan can be used as a central repository of all preparations for the move forward, which may include new sanitation methods and schedules, the use of physical barriers between workstations, or adjustments to building ventilation systems.

Looking beyond the infectious disease policy, the reentry plan should include any alterations or additions to prior standard operating procedures, training and support. Spell out credentialing and verification requirements associated with reentry and future operations, including those for contractors.

2. Has the organization communicated these policies and procedures, and what systems are in place to enable and enforce them?

When workers begin returning to offices, processing centers, manufacturing plants and even open-air sites, all stakeholders must be clear on new expectations and how they should comply. Corporations must demonstrate command and

control of new SOPs. These policies must also be communicated to facility visitors including vendors. Companies should verify their understanding and ability to comply with the new policies and procedures.

Along with establishing reliable communication channels with workers, contractors and vendors, companies must identify reliable information sources related to COVID-19 and future health threats. Errant information on the virus and effective response measures are prevalent, and employers need to articulate infectious disease policies across a broad spectrum of workers. Conveying the most reliable information related to unique business operations and through multiple locations is critical.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

As reentry accelerates under the holistic plan, attention to the following key areas will help to improve the well-being of the company's workforce and their work:

Revisit training offerings. Returning workers may need to catch up on job-specific instruction programs or other requirements to reinstate certifications that may have lapsed during the months of sheltering in place. Managers should plan for the potential backlog of team members due for all manner of courses and should determine how any expected delays will affect operations.

The organization may choose to offer courses that address specific post-pandemic issues. A disease awareness program, for example, should outline facts from reputable sources, proactive prevention measures and appropriate behavior. This will provide companies peace of mind that their workforces understand the severity of the virus and its effects, can identify symptoms, take precautionary steps, and respond correctly if they or a coworker become ill.

On a related point, organizations may want to include behavior-based safety to their instruction programs. The heightened emotion and stress that many workers experienced in recent months may



impact their behavior in the workplace, affecting the safety of themselves and those around them. Including behavior-based safety with standardized disease awareness training emphasizes to workers how their attitude affects their behavior and how it has larger consequences on a company and its entire workforce.

Provide enforcement tools. Effectively administering new standard operating procedures requires a significant investment of time, people and systems. Building a framework and charting a course for implementation is vital.

Systems that track the completion of these tasks help individuals and teams to demonstrate compliance with government regulations, internal and client policies, health and safety requirements, contractual obligations, and standards for licensing and industry certifications. As businesses return to the workplace, that list is expanding to document the successful completion of disease-control protocols such as sanitation schedules and individual health screening information.

Regularly review — and adapt. Commit to monitor standard operating procedures and identify opportunities for improvement. Adopting a consistent approach for processing crucial insights and rolling out adjustments will minimize the confusion and disruption that can accompany changes, making it easier for the organization to enhance safety by applying lessons learned.

With the right tools, managers can know which employees and contractors are authorized to perform tasks, enter restricted areas or step into other specialized roles.

Doing so helps them to avoid exposing people, facilities and their company to legal and financial liabilities, health risks and other undesirable consequences.

By applying credentialing and verification systems to their reentry strategies, companies are able to protect their workforces as regulations evolve, documenting their awareness and understanding at any given point in time. Comprehensive tracking and verification as firms return to the workplace affords them a safe, precautionary route to continued business operations. FMJ



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