Eight areas of focus for restoring business operations

Risk Control insights

Helmsman Management Services LLC®

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), COVID-19 is expected to remain a public health threat. Community containment has helped slow the spread of this disease throughout the country, and we will need to continue to focus on these efforts.

As sections of the country slowly reinstate parts of the workforce, critical strategies need to be considered in anticipating returning to business operations. It is important to stay connected with the CDC - COVID-19 Guidance as well as guidances from state and municipal Departments of Health.

1. Health and well-being of your workforce

Recognize that the stress of the pandemic will impact people differently. This is the time to be proactive and provide support through employee assistance programs and to remain steadfast with management communication and interaction with the workforce.

Collaborate with legal counsel and Human Resource departments on policies for time off, closures, and medical and mental health benefits. With continued school and day care closures it may be difficult for many to return to work outside of their home.

2. Help reduce the spread of the virus

Continue to monitor CDC guidance to educate your workforce on how to keep themselves healthy, and to identify early symptoms of COVID-19. Review this material at team meetings, and post prominently around the workplace.

Consider communicating these important actions:

a. Stay home if you are sick (cough, shortness of breath, fever, chills, sore throat, muscle pain, headache, new loss of taste or smell).

b. Wear a face covering over your mouth and nose if you are around others, particularly if you are unable to maintain social distancing

c. Encourage frequent handwashing, scrubbing all areas of the hands and wrist, use hand sanitizers, and avoid contact with your eyes, nose, and mouth

d. Retain recommended social distancing of at least 6 feet.

e. Consider installing barrier guards and eliminate open food and drink distribution.

f. Avoid large gatherings including office meetings, and limit travel.

g. Phase in and stagger shifts to reduce the number of workers, and continue work from home options where possible.

h. Implement symptom screening for workers and visitors focusing on the CDC criteria. It is critical that such practices be discussed with legal counsel, as the information obtained may have implications on employment practices.

i. Develop consistent human resource practices regarding returning workers back to the operation if they have been ill.

3. Facilities

Clean facilities prior to reopening. Increase cleaning throughout the work shift, paying additional attention to high-touch workspaces such as door handles, elevator floor and call buttons, shared work areas/ desks, handrails, restrooms, computer equipment, and powered industrial equipment controls and tools. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has a list of Registered List N: Disinfectants for Use against SARS-CoV-2 based on known and proven effectiveness with other similar viruses.

4. Business relationships

Verify your supplier network of materials and services to be certain that renewed demands can be met with the same level of quality and sustainability.

Review transactional data and contractual agreements and timelines. Work with legal counsel to verify contractual commitments and risk transfer before reopening.

5. Operations restoration

Contact local law enforcement, public health, and public safety authorities about your intent and timeline of reopening and obtain inspection verification from authorities that may be needed. Review lease agreements and other contractual obligations.

Verify that building security and fire protection features are fully operational and that utility service agreements can be renewed without gaps. Identify changes in neighborhood dynamics that may pose an additional risk to your business or property (e.g., traffic patterns, yard storage and security, lighting, etc.).

6. Redeploy idle equipment

Examine idle and operational equipment. Implement a phase-in approach to recommission key machines and processes. Test and verify critical functions for quality product output and safeguards to help protect workers.

7. HVAC system

If the HVAC system has been shut off or minimized for several weeks, consider steps to normalize the building's ventilation. This should include an increase the introduction of outdoor, fresh air into the HVAC system. Improvements in air filtration to the MERV-13 or the highest level compatible with the filter rack, and seal edges of the filter to limit bypass. Keep the building's HVAC system running longer hours, if possible 24/7, to enhance dilution ventilation and air filtration capabilities.

If the system does not allow for filtration levels of MERV-13 or better, consider temporarily supplementing the system with portable room air cleaners with HEPA filters.

8. Building water systems

If the facility has been dormant for several weeks, building maintenance should implement a flush of the hot and cold-water delivery system by conducting a high temperature or chlorination disinfection. This procedure should be addressed in your facility's water management program. If your facility does not have a water management program, consult the CDC for guidance.

After disinfection, a water system flush should be completed by opening all point-of-use devices (i.e. faucets, nozzles, water fountains (bubblers), etc.) and flushing water through all branch lines, valves, storage tanks (both hot and cold-water tanks), other reservoirs, etc. for all hot and cold-water delivery systems in the building.

If the facility uses cartridge filters (i.e. activated carbon granules or carbon block, sediment filters, etc.) for point-of-use filtration or for whole building filtration, the filter cartridges should be replaced according to the manufacturer's recommended filter type and model. During the period of prolonged stagnation, bacteria may have amplified on the surface of the filter media.

For HVAC systems that utilize cooling towers, the water in the cooling tower basin or storage tank should be recirculated at regular intervals using a recirculation pump on a timer to prevent stagnation. Alternatively, the entire system should be drained and cleaned per the manufacturer's cleaning procedures. After thorough cleaning, follow all written start up procedures to place the HVAC and cooling tower system back in service.

Looking for more comprehensive safety information? As a policyholder, you have exclusive access to risk control tools and resources through SafetyNet — visit **lmi.co/safetynet**

For more information, contact your local service director or the Risk Control Consulting Center. Email anytime — **RCConsultingCenter@LibertyMutual.com** — or call 1-866-757-7324, Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. eastern.