

AFTER THE LOCKDOWN

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FACILITY MANAGERS AND CONSULTANTS

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The COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic is still with us, and throughout the world governments have issued varying controls of socialization with stay at home orders, except for what is set as essential services. What is considered essential services can also vary by country - but each service typically operates from a facility, whether it is a hospital, a data center or a distribution warehouse. Facility managers and facility management consultants have an imperative role to their staff colleagues or clients to coordinate health and safety protocols in workplaces still operating and those who may be reopening. Until a vaccine is found to counter the COVID-19 virus, life in the workplace will not be the same as it was prior to the virus.

Plan, prepare and implement

It is essential that organizational departments such as facility management, finance, legal, and human resources communicate before increasing worker capacity at the facility following earlier reduction due to risk from the pandemic. Collaboration of the organization departments in the planning stage is required to make decisions on worker and customer safety, budget, compliance, and revised employee policies. The next stage is to prepare not only for increased staff or customer presence, but to be ready for any COVID-19 issue that may develop. Facility managers will likely have a key role in the implementation stage as it is the facility management department that is responsible for matters of security, cleaning, space management and waste management.

Some procedures to consider when facilities reopen or increase capacity

At most larger workplaces, staff health and safety policies are in general created and updated by management, health and safety staff and human resources. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (in the United States, or its counterparts in other countries) has procedures specific to facilities needing to operate during the COVID-19 pandemic; you can see the fundamental role of facility management in each of the following steps (not a complete list):

Temperature checks: Employees are encouraged to self monitor their temperature at home before going to work; and employers may perform employee temperature checks upon entering the workplace. Using a remote infrared thermometer may be tasked to security staff or at least coordinated with security staff who report to the facility manager. Training and procedures for security staff (or contracted security) will need to be developed by the facility manager along with the recording of data, if required.

Asymptomatic employees: Employees who report to work each day should also have no symptoms of the Coronavirus. Security should also be directed by the facility manager to ask each employee on how they are feeling as they enter, and direct employees who may not feel well to leave the workplace and report to the manager as convenient off the work site.

Masks: The Centers of Disease Control (CDC) has identified the wearing of masks important in limiting the spread of the Coronavirus. If management/human resources decide on mask wearing among employees at the workplace, facility managers will need to implement mask wearing

procedures for contractors (such as cleaning, security, waste management, other contract maintenance) for the safety of those contractors as well as the safety of employees working at the facility. Ordering, storage and disposal of masks may also be tasks that the facility manager will be directed to arrange. *It should be noted that masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE) are not recommended by the US Department of Labor for low risk workplaces (where there is no to low interaction between the facility workers and the general public.)*

Social distance: The CDC calls for maintaining at least 6' (1.8 meters) distance between people to avoid exposure. Facility managers will need to look into staff traffic flows, workstation locations, closed off areas and use of amenities (e.g., lunchroom, gym, locker rooms). Modular and stand-alone furniture may need to be repositioned along and shared environments separated or allotted to meet the 6' guideline.

Cleaning and disinfecting: Higher levels of cleaning will be needed while the virus remains a threat. Facility managers will need to work with cleaning staff or contractors to thoroughly disinfect high touch surfaces and will likely need to put in place day cleaning (if cleaning was after hours only) to clean and disinfect areas of concern in addition to high touch areas. To keep costs down, areas of the facility closed or unused can be cleaned less often and staff can reduce infection by using hand sanitizers located by high touch surfaces (arranged by facility managers).

How may these procedures impact facility maintenance costs?

As facility management consultants, we are often asked not just to improve the operation of buildings and workspaces but to seek cost savings at the same time. Each of the procedures above (again, not a complete list) will result in increased costs for the facility at a time when all budgets, due to the economic impact of the COVID-19, need to be cut instead. Facility managers may have to defend the new costs as imperative in the fight against COVID-19 as well as being mostly temporary, until the pandemic ends. Remember that providers of services and supplies are strongly motivated to retain FM customers should welcome and readily take part in adjustments and innovations rather than lose an account and business relationship.

When minimizing expenses, protect the organization by properly identifying COVID-19 risk levels

Guidance can be found from government agencies (e.g., [CDC](#)) so that the scope is rationalized, keeping costs more manageable. Facility managers should look for timely cost savings in areas of the facility less used or closed off, possibly reallocating resources from areas needing less attention.

Post COVID-19 – a new normal?

There is already much discussion now about how the pandemic will permanently change the way we manage facilities and socialize within them. It is an interesting debate now, and no doubt more so in the future, as we see how people adjust after this almost surreal period of lockdown and reducing the spread of the virus. It is likely that, at a minimum, hand sanitizers will be more prevalent in the future, with prominent signage about the use of sanitizer and proper hand washing.

Whatever the legacy of this pandemic in the workplace, facility managers and consultants have a crucial part to play.

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