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How will you change your workplace when we reopen? - by Andrew Fraser

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We will soon begin a phased return to a “new norm” workplace and there are several COVID-19 workplace provisions being introduced around the world. Every firm will have different priorities but the two “must do” provisions for offices in any jurisdiction are social distancing and the availability of hand washing facilities. There are other provisions which may appeal to some firms but these two are a must in any workplace, including construction sites. Construction has already restarted and several of the below COVID-19 provisions have been mandated by the state of Massachusetts and other states for construction projects. Every project permitted in the state must submit a site specific COVID-19 mitigation plan for review and approval by the local building department. These plans are then implemented by the general contractor and subject to spot check inspections by the local jurisdiction.

Workplaces are all different, city and suburban, office and warehouse but the below provisions should be considered by each and every firm returning to work. What may be good for your firm may not be as effective for another. The reality is that whatever item your firm chooses to implement consider it a good, long-term investment in to a healthier and safer work environment.

Space Layout

Increased distancing to 6’; spacing at workstations, conference rooms, cafes and collaboration areas. Divider partitions may also be added to workstations, trading desks or tables to create barriers between staff.

Security

Automatic doors operated via Bluetooth or smartphone. Remote capabilities for elevator controls. Ceiling mounted temperature tracking devices, room counter devices.

Building Owner Considerations

Increased fresh air intake and/or increased air circulation. Air disinfection and purification equipment. Humidification control in air distribution systems. Controlling HVAC systems to

accommodate staggered work shifts. COVID-19 cleaning capabilities.

Additional Provisions

Added hand washing stations, hand sanitizer stations. Changing out existing plumbing fixtures and bathroom accessories to motion sensor. Larger urinal screens in mens restrooms. Mask and glove dispensers.

Most of the above items can be procured and installed in a few days or weeks maximum and most of the items do not require permitting. The above work items would be considered “service” work and could be furnished and installed by a single trade subcontractor; preferably a subcontractor who is familiar with the building and ideally, the subcontractor who performed the original installation of the item to be modified.

Whatever improvement your firm elects to proceed with, consider it a good investment in the overall health and safety for your staff and for your workplace.

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