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VIRTUAL POP UP

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Pop-Up Webinar: Key Takeaways

16 April 2020

As we look at the return to office strategy, I'd like to understand how to decide what is business critical. As companies prioritize their staggered approach to re-entry, how are you setting parameters around who needs to be in the office first?

- We're an energy company, and we're in kind of a unique situation in that we have a corporate office, but we also have many employees working in the field on various well operations. We are struggling with how to define those business-critical people who need to be in the office. One reason is that it's working well for our people to be at home. That's very unusual because the oil and gas sector is primarily a butts-in-seats type of group, and they're typically not going to be one to readily embrace different types of working environments. We tried to incorporate more communal areas in our new building, and it hasn't really gone the way we thought it would. We were very nervous about sending all our office-based staff home to work, but it has worked very well. The only areas we have struggled with is how to handle the mail, and then the production of physical checks; we have a printer that cannot be moved. Other than that, it's working. How are we going to define who is mission critical? While our executive team would like to see everybody back together, the reality is that working remotely is working. We are starting to put together a plan for what the phase-in effort will look like, including physical distancing measures. It's all the more interesting because we have spent a lot of time and money to outfit our office, we have all these engineers who like to have drawings on the wall, and now we are thinking 'why did we spend all this money on our office when it's clearly working to be remote?'
- We are in the manufacturing business, so our plant is large enough to accommodate social distancing and all the proper precautions. But the back-office functions, which includes customer service and marketing, are working remotely just fine. So, our back-to-work strategy for those functions will be a continuation of that to some degree.

In terms of defining mission critical, if companies come up with a muddy answer, are employees going to think that returning to the office is voluntary for most people?

- For us, it's a work in progress. We would allow anyone who needs to continue working from home due to child-care issues, being medically vulnerable or just being uncomfortable about

returning to continue doing that for now. We are also taking weekly pulse surveys of our staff to find out which teams are struggling the most with working from home. It is our engineering teams that are struggling most, and we are trying to bring them back first. It might be different teams coming back on different days.

If we are going to need to take temperatures when employees come back to the office, how are we going to do that?

- We purchased thermal sensors from a company in California. That's what we are using to screen associates as they return to work. We will be doing this at all our locations.

Who are you using for the thermal screening? Internal employees, or contractors?

- We are using our security guard force to do that. They will be wearing the N95 masks.

Are you funneling employees through a single-entry point?

- Yes. This is all through the main entrance. We have closed all the other entrances.

Aren't more and more governments requiring face masks?

- A lot of different governments are starting to institute face-covering rules. In [Pennsylvania](#), beginning Sunday evening at 8 p.m., employees and customers at essential businesses now must wear masks. This is enforceable with jail time and financial penalties. While we have been able to source paper masks, we are really struggling, frankly, on the reusable masks that that we know we will need across the board, making sure they are CDC compliant and that we can get them in a timely manner. My advice is to start thinking through what that will look like and making sure you've got good intel coming out of your legislative groups so you can react quickly. We have substantial operations in Pennsylvania, so we are trying to source thousands of CDC grade, reusable masks.
- At our company, we've decided to require surgical-grade masks. It only protects people if everyone is wearing them. I don't think it does a lot of good if you only make it optional.

Shouldn't it be the employee's responsibility to provide these masks? You could argue that people already must wear them, if they are out and about. Why does the workplace have to provide these?

- We have decided to provide them. If associates want to bring their own from home, we're allowing that.
- We are assuming that some employees will bring their own, but we are providing them as well, in case someone forgets theirs, or if we have visitors coming in who need one.
- If the company is providing masks, then the company must supply them for all employees. That is an OSHA requirement. There are a fair number of [OSHA](#) requirements that work that way.
- I also wonder how we decide which agencies have authority in which areas: OSHA, CDC, others. Any number of agencies can get involved in conflicting or overlapping areas of regulation.

- I believe a lot of this is going to come from government mandates and what the government expects. Here in New York City, simply commuting to work has social distancing issues. We can keep everyone separated once they get to the office, but what about what happens on the way in? I think returning 100 percent of our people to the office is probably not likely, and it might well be that governments will mandate limits on workplace occupancy.
- Our company has a business response team that has been working on this throughout. They have shifted to a new task force for returning to the office. It's a multidisciplinary team of Legal, HR, Real Estate, Strategic Communications and representatives from all business units to help set the guidelines and identify the triggers that would start people coming back into the office. We don't feel we have to rush in; things seem to be working well currently with people working from home. Some individuals are having more trouble than others in terms of childcare and so on. We are anticipating that we will have to adjust our plans based on government mandates.

We understand how to deploy social distancing across our floor for seating. But what is everyone considering for pantries, restrooms and other shared spaces?

- We are increasing cleaning services in all areas. That's increasing from a couple of times per day to six or seven times per day, including all the high-touch areas. And our cleaning will increase in the evening and on the weekend. We have changed standards of cleaning products per the CDC. This does affect some LEED things, but this is required.
- We are placing more emphasis on signage for cleaning, disinfecting and handwashing. We've installed a foot-operated door opener in our restrooms, the same mechanism that was discussed in the prior webinar.
- We are focusing on communications and being as transparent as possible to the employees and staff and communicating to them with visuals and verbal cues. We want them to know that our workspace is being cleaned diligently, so we're doing it during hours, not after hours, so employees can see that it's being done.

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