

SAFER

Safe Actions For Employee Returns



SAFER Framework Summary

Background

The core objective of SAFER is establishing sustainable safe operations for employers and workers as they navigate what the world of work looks like as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our short-term objectives are to:

- Aggregate and analyze current practice and guidance from the business and public health communities
- Develop and publish regularly updated data-driven guidance and recommendations for safe return to and continuation of work, both broadly and relative to specific risks, industries, or conditions as they emerge
- Provide employers the tools and solutions they need to take action in complicated and challenging times
- Investigate the topic areas and operations types representing the most pressing concerns for employers planning for return to work.

The below framework is suggested based on review of dozens of corporate and public health protocols, recommendations, and guidance resources (a full list of publicly-available material is provided at the end of this document). The framework represents a map of the key areas around which corporate and public policy leaders are taking action, as well as the operations types in play, and will be the basis from which SAFER will build its recommendations for a safe return to and continuation of work. This framework is open to modification based on the feedback of the SAFER Task Force, a consortium of Fortune 500 companies, leading safety organizations, and public health professionals and experts. A full list of Task Force members is included at the end of this document. A more detailed description and list of considerations related to each of these topic areas follows.

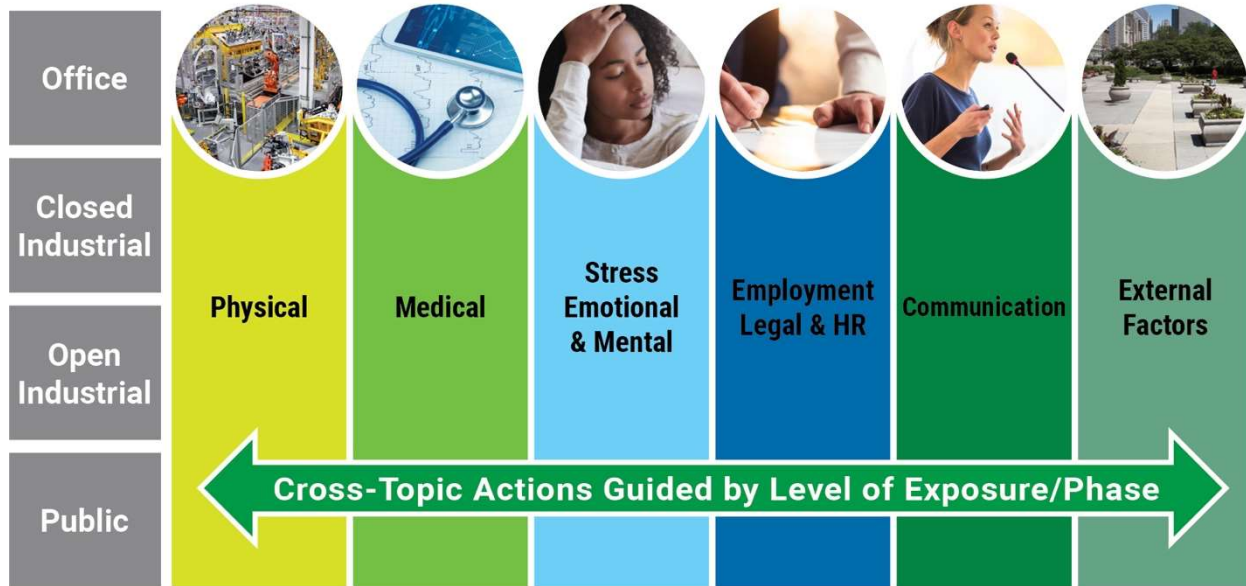
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SAFER Framework



Areas of Clarity and Challenge

It is important to note that not all topic areas for returning to a safe workplace within the framework are created equally. Some topic areas have clearer, more widely-accepted guidance available, while others are more complex in scope or require information or solutions not yet available. Although much of the guidance presented in this document has universal applicability, regional or local public policy may constrain wholesale implementation across all sites of an organization.

Examples of areas of clarity include guidance around physical distancing, need for widespread testing and contact tracing, and usage of face coverings and other personal protective equipment. Examples of areas of challenge include supply and authenticity of personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies, infrastructure and capacity for regular testing and certain medical aspects related to the pandemic itself (e.g. disinfection, immunity, etc.). Although the SAFER Framework does not yet address which topic areas are more established in terms of accepted guidance and which areas are still awaiting further clarity, the SAFER Task Force is expected to discuss and act on these issues as appropriate.

Next Steps

It is anticipated that the SAFER Task Force will review and make suggested changes and additions to the framework over the course of its first few weeks of operation. Concurrently and in conjunction with the SAFER Task Force, the National Safety Council SAFER research team will update the overall framework while conducting deeper investigation into each topic area, synthesizing existing and emerging guidance, strategy and tactics. This work would result in a more concrete framework (envisioned below) as well as specific, actionable playbooks within each topic area. Additional outputs could include a set of recommendations or overlay of factors on an operations-type basis (e.g. enclosed industrial, open industrial, office, public working environments). It is the intent of the National Safety Council to have these deliverables available on a rolling basis as soon as feasible.

Note that this document as well as more specific playbooks will include exploration of/guidance on legal, labor, and other considerations within each topic area.

Considerations & Actions by Phase	Phase 0: Pandemic Mode Widespread Transmission & Significant Restrictions	Phase 1: Limited Operating Mode Declining/Flat Transmission & Reduced Restrictions	Phase 2: Eased Restriction Mode Contained Transmission & Minimal Restrictions	Phase 3: "New Normal" Mode Monitored Transmission & Long-Term Policy
Physical				
Medical				
Stress, Emotional & Mental Health				
Employment, Legal & HR				
Communication				
External Factors				

Physical Considerations

Preparing the physical workplace for return to work

A major consideration every organization should evaluate before issuing a return-to-work order are the practices they have adopted to promote a safe physical environment for workers. Employers should develop procedures for building maintenance and care, maintaining physical distance, and mitigating risks for employees who need to perform work in public environments that are outside of the organization's control.

Buildings, Facilities and Operations

Although many employers have had to carry on essential work operations in their facilities despite shelter-in-place restrictions, these businesses and others will have employees returning to physical environments that need to be adequately prepared for infection control and physical distancing practices. Employers should consider the following actions when preparing physical spaces for a return to work:

- Schedule a full sanitization of the facility and equipment prior to returning employees to work (consider there may be a required inspection audit or proof of full sanitization by local authorities before a facility may be allowed to re-open)
- Assess the space to determine the maximum capacity possible when occupants maintain the advised distance from each other; then monitor the number of people occupying that space to ensure the maximum is not exceeded
- To reduce touch points, install motion-detection sensors in place of switches where possible
- Conduct a formal assessment for determining areas (e.g., rooms, gathering areas, areas dedicated to critical or essential workers, etc.) that can be closed off that are not needed to do business, and then close access to them
- Classify worker exposure to SARS-CoV-2 (i.e., [OSHA's Occupational Risk Pyramid](#)) in order to determine and implement control measures
- Consider installing hands-free arm-pull or foot-operated door openers where possible
- Develop site cleaning guides and frequency (e.g., hourly, twice per day) that specifically address heavy usage areas (e.g., restrooms, elevators, onsite gyms/exercise rooms, elevator buttons, door handles), cleaning chemical inventories, secondary containment training and labeling and training for proper disinfection techniques (e.g., disinfecting incoming equipment for service centers)
- Inspect core building infrastructure including HVAC, water systems, and plumbing to appropriately flush the systems and install new filters, etc.
- Inventory, procure and store Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) needed based on worker risk exposure

- Train and post signage for proper PPE usage, identification (e.g., face shield for grinding operations versus plastic barrier for screening), etc.
- Develop process for procurement and storage of hazardous materials (e.g., hand sanitizer, cleaners, disinfectants)
- Develop a workplace reconfiguration plan that takes physical distancing requirements into account, including occupancy limits for areas, workstation repositioning and common areas
- Develop and deploy site pre-check assessments and readiness audits prior to reintroducing employees
- Provide resources to temporary workers in terms of training and safety and health protections, including providing PPE (see https://www.osha.gov/temp_workers)
- Establish protocols for proper disposal of face masks, gloves, and other disposable PPE worn during work shifts
- Establish protocols for proper cleaning and disinfection of PPE if it is able to be reused
- Develop, implement and monitor a training program to ensure employees wear PPE properly
- Develop a plan for the safe restart of site assets and equipment including restart procedures, equipment maintenance audits, and preparation checks
- Develop and implement a COVID-19 inspection checklist to ensure that compliance to the physical conditions requirements are met

Physical Distancing

Once employees have passed entrance screening, there are still potential risks inside of a workplace that can be at least partially mitigated through physical distancing protocols. Employers should consider the following actions to promote and encourage appropriate physical distancing in the workplace:

- Facilitate use of individual rather than collective transport to limit possible exposure
- Use visual cues and signage that encourage physical distancing
- Recommend conducting formal risk assessments for determining the most reliable physical distancing recommendations (i.e., using the hierarchy to decide on controls), especially in high-risk or out of process activities
- Designate separate entrances and exits for buildings and rooms, if possible, and provide directional signage for traffic flow along with physical distancing reminders/cues (e.g., maintain six feet, one-way pedestrian traffic flow, floor markings)
- Arrange workspaces for appropriate physical distancing between desks/chairs/conference tables (e.g., use only alternate desks, remove chairs and tables)
- Document and display appropriate occupancy for rooms to allow for proper physical distancing given specific square footage

- Continuously monitor space use and density for different floors and/or heavily trafficked rooms (e.g., conference rooms)
- Support policy, training, signage, etc. with enforcement of physical distancing (e.g. verbal warning, corrective action, etc.)
- Consider installing physical barriers like plastic sneeze guards between work spaces that cannot conform to physical distancing guidelines
- Designate increments of acceptable physical distance on floors where lines might form (e.g., entrance to building, restrooms, etc.)
- Identify physical bottlenecks where physical distancing is more difficult and implement plans for alleviating bottlenecks (e.g., restrooms, corridors, stairwells)
- Develop protocols for use of confined spaces like elevators (e.g., limit capacity to 2-3 people, guide employees on how to position themselves in elevators, etc.)
- Remove furniture in congregation-prone areas to discourage physical closeness (e.g., reception areas, waiting rooms, dining areas, etc.)
- Consider other factors for physical distancing, such as staggered shift operations, staggered meetings using audio/visual tools for communicating and staggered break times
- Find alternate ways to clock in
- Establish when face coverings need to be used or not (e.g., passing in the hallway versus having a conversation in the hallway)
- Consider designating additional break rooms and lunchrooms to limit worker density and allow proper physical distancing
- Consider using technologies to monitor and govern physical distancing throughout a physical location
- Stress the importance of practicing physical distancing while taking public transportation to and from work

Public Workspace Risk Management

In certain cases, employees may have to conduct work in a public environment or an environment outside the direct control of their organization. To mitigate risk to the employee, and to mitigate risk to the public, employers should consider the following actions:

- When possible, set an extended perimeter around a workspace to place adequate distance between the worker(s) and other individuals
- Ensure employee vehicles (owned by the employer) always have sufficient levels of necessary COVID-19-specific PPE (e.g., masks, gloves, etc.)
- Provide training to all employees how to operate safely in public spaces or environments outside the direct control of the organization

- Advance communication with external sites to discuss and confirm that COVID-19 guidelines (e.g., physical distancing, etc.) are being followed to the best of the external site's ability
- When possible, advance communication as to whether individuals at the site have recently been confirmed positive
- Provide a method for employees to request additional PPE
- Provide a method for employees to report unsafe behavior by fellow employees or exposure-related incidents (e.g. forced to be near an individual showing symptoms of an illness)
- In lone worker scenarios, provide a direct line of communication with the company in case of sudden illness or emergency situations
- Implement policies to limit the number of workers needed to be present to carry out any tasks off of company-owned property

Medical Health Considerations

Protecting the health of workers before and after returning to the workplace

Prioritizing the physical health of workers as they return to the workplace is key to protecting their physical safety. Employers should develop procedures for monitoring and promoting the medical health of the workforce, ensuring appropriate physical distancing, and encouraging overall good hygiene and infection control practices. For additional information visit the World Health Organization website at <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

Screening and Reporting

In order for employees to return to a workplace, many organizations may institute screening (through self-assessments and temperature checks) to clear employees for entry into a building or site. While these screening methods are not foolproof measures to detect COVID-19, organizations should consider the following actions:

- Provide written communication and/or webinars to inform employees how, when and where screenings will be conducted and what will happen should an employee “fail” a temperature screening or provide an unwanted answer on a screening questionnaire
- Engage safety committees in assisting with creating guidelines
- Outline and make employees aware of the procedure for failed COVID-19 screenings
- Ensure mechanisms are in place to track and understand completion and engagement metrics around screening communications and training
- Create guidelines for supervisors and managers in the event of a failed screening and ensure the employee has transportation and a place in which to shelter/self-isolate
- Establish a process, including speaking points, for communicating to employees who have been in contact with a symptomatic employee (e.g., what steps occur as a result, self-quarantine, area closed for deep cleaning, etc.)
- Draft talking points for supervisors and managers to inform employees about a confirmed case in a calm, informative manner
- Communicate exposure information and screening results with third-party employers, such as staffing companies providing temporary workers, in a timely manner
- Help employers conduct needed public-health oriented measures (e.g., temperature checks) while also following HIPAA regulations for health data/information
- Develop self-screening procedures for a dispersed workforce that reports to job sites, but not a company central location
- Implement signage and other hazard controls in entrance screening cueing areas (ensure that cue is protected from adjacent vehicle traffic)

Responding to Medical Health Concerns

In the event that an employee fails a screening process (e.g., registers a fever, tests positive for COVID-19) and/or exhibits symptoms related to COVID-19, employers need to be ready to respond and should consider the following actions to address medical concerns:

- Develop, communicate and train employees on entrance screening protocol including temperature checks and response protocol for failed screenings while following EEOC guidelines for HIPAA compliance
- Consider, when possible, reliable temperature measurement and monitoring systems that require minimal operator intervention or that work as a standalone hands-free self-service system
- Identify screeners and protocol for screener safety (e.g., appropriate PPE) and tracking of temperature checks or health assessments
- Develop COVID-19 medical reporting protocols for workers that develop symptoms
- Set up an isolation room and associated protocols including required equipment and procedures for entering/exiting and transportation guidelines
- Dispense PPE to symptomatic workers and place in isolation
- Document and track failed screenings for contact tracing and arrange transportation home for workers denied entry
- Develop protocol for reporting positive test results to appropriate public health authorities as needed
- Provide self-quarantine guidelines for workers who fail screening, check-in with them regularly and develop protocol for post-quarantine return to work
- Develop, communicate and train all employees on protocols in the event of a colleague exhibiting symptoms
- Establish disposal procedures and necessary equipment for PPE that will no longer be utilized (e.g., spent face coverings, gloves, respirators)

Hygiene and Infection Control

Employers should strongly encourage their employees to practice good hygiene and infection control. They should also provide ample opportunity for workers to engage in proper hygiene practices. Specifically, employers should consider the following actions to promote workplace hygiene:

- Encourage workers to stay home if they feel sick and if an onset of symptoms develop while at work, report it immediately (communicate any changes to sick time policies, like previous requirements for a physician's note when out more than a certain number of days)
- Encourage frequent hand washing and make hand sanitizer available in several locations, especially near common touchpoints

- Train and post signage about proper hand hygiene techniques in washrooms and break rooms
- Provide adequate amounts and locations of tissues, no-touch trash cans, soap and alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Consider installing hands-free arm-pull or foot-operated door openers in restrooms and for other heavily trafficked doors
- Encourage proper respiratory etiquette including covering coughs and sneezes with either a tissue or coughing into a sleeve (encourage wearing a face mask if deemed necessary and appropriate)
- Discourage the shared use of objects to the extent possible (e.g., phones, computers, office equipment and supplies, kitchen equipment and supplies) and when not possible, disinfect before/after use
- Provide training and information on proper disinfection techniques for shared spaces and objects (when unavoidable)
- Consider extending cleaning services (or develop a cleaning checklist) to include shared company vehicles, where applicable
- Consider strategically placing branded visual signage as a straightforward approach to remind people how to reduce their risk (i.e., with a focus on high-risk areas)
- Explain the difference between cleaning and disinfecting
- Provide employees with disinfecting cleaning wipes to clean their own spaces such as desks, keyboards, phones, etc. on a regular basis
- Advise staff of how to treat items brought into the clean workplace (e.g., personal possessions, food items, laptops, PPE, etc.)

Stress, Emotional & Mental Health Considerations

Providing employees the support needed to return to work

The safety and physical health of employees is top of mind for organizations as they look to reopen workplaces and have workforces return. Another set of considerations for employers is how they intend to allay the concerns, anxieties and uncertainty that workers may feel about their jobs and the future of the organization when returning to work. Additionally, employees may have experienced high levels of stress associated with financial, employment, food or housing instabilities, the long-term effects of which may continue to impact employees' return to work and their ability to safely focus on the job at hand.

Extended social isolation increases risk for the development of mental health issues and substance use disorders, can exacerbate pre-existing conditions, and increases the risk of relapse or deterioration for people in recovery. Isolation is a well-documented risk factor for suicide, and connectedness is one of the best protective factors that helps to increase people's resilience and buffer them against the risk of suicide. Below are several factors for employers to consider regarding employee emotional and mental health when drafting overall plans for returning to work and full operations.

Connecting Employees to Mental Health Resources

Employers have a unique ability and responsibility to manage their relationship with benefit providers, such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and health insurance plans to ensure workers have access to the help and support they need. Having employees know their employers are supporting them through these difficult times can make a significant difference for their mental and physical health. Human Resources teams and supervisors can help make this difference a reality.

- Encourage EAPs and health insurance plans to be very active in promoting their telephone and online counseling services through various communications, campaigns, etc.
- Establish a mental health taskforce with management representation from all functional areas and provide training on how to spot the signs of mental health issues and approaches for handling or starting a conversation with an employee who is exhibiting signs (consider having an identifier worn or used by every member of the taskforce so employees can easily identify who they can speak with should they want to do so)
- Communicate frequently to reassure employees they can get help for any kind of problem, and promote a culture that normalizes seeking support

- Consider using mobile and digital tools to provide resources
- Repeatedly share all the resources provided by your benefits providers and local community programs
- Provide easy links to national support hotlines, including but not limited to:
 - [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#)
 - [Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline](#)
 - [The National Domestic Violence Hotline](#)
 - [Eldercare Locator](#)
 - [National Sexual Assault Hotline](#)
 - [Find a Health Center](#)
 - [211.org \(multilingual resource to connect to local crisis and emergency services\)](#)
 - [Aunt Bertha Resource Database \(multilingual resource to connect to reduced-cost social services\)](#)
 - [SAMHSA National Helpline](#)
 - [Crisis Text Line | Text HOME To 741741 for free 24/7 Crisis Counseling](#)
 - [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\): Find Support](#)
- Provide information about where to access self-screening assessments, for example:
 - [Mental Health American Self Screening Tests](#)
- Adjust and communicate appropriate HR policies and resources:
 - Provide a confidential helpline or email address for employees to get help accessing personal resources and treatment privately
 - Provide a confidential helpline for employees to raise job-related concerns anonymously
 - Be ready to provide assistance or links to local or national resources on common employee concerns, such as applying for unemployment, food insecurity, childcare, etc.

Other Transition Policies and Resources

While the pandemic created an obvious disruption to everyday lives, the return to work creates another type of disruption from what has become the “new normal” of sheltering in place and/or working from home. Organizations may want to consider the following actions to provide support and resources for employees as they transition back to the workplace:

- Allow for flexible policies as schools restart, daycares reopen and schedules become reestablished
- As part of EAP, offer financial counseling and support to help employees manage financial stress
- As part of EAP, provide counseling for substance misuse, fatigue, family stress and general mental health support; if counseling cannot be provided by the company, ensure policies allow for increased need for off-site counseling

- Recognize that stress and mental distraction can pose great hazards to worker safety, and take extra precautions for workers performing high-risk tasks
- Provide workers with education and opportunities to practice practical ways of reducing stress, such as mindfulness training, deep breathing and exercise (e.g., yoga)
- Provide support and information for employees anxious about leaving the relative safety of quarantine
- Allow for flexible policies as employees receive elective and routine medical care that may have been postponed due to the pandemic
- Allow for flexibility of employees to utilize paid time off to spend time with family or loved ones they were physically separated from during quarantine to help restore their connection with others, reduce stress, and regain a sense of normalcy
- Provide training for all leadership, supervisors, and employees on recognizing the signs of stress and how to create a culture of support and trust
- Educate all leadership, supervisors and employees on:
 - Understanding the impacts of COVID-19 on stress, mental health and substance use
 - Recognizing the signs of impairment, substance misuse or mental health distress
 - How to engage in mental health first aid and suicide prevention efforts
 - How to refer employees to other resources and support
- Recognize that the stress and mental health effects may be prolonged or delayed, and allow for a long transition period of several months

Employment, Legal & Human Resources Considerations

Preparing the workforce to transition back to the workplace

A major consideration beyond the protocols to address the physical, medical, emotional and mental issues of reopening the workplace is the cumulative level of change that employees have experienced over weeks and months. Workers will undoubtedly have many questions and/or anxieties about transitioning back to a physical work environment, in terms of both their safety and health as well as disruption to what has become the “new normal” of sheltering in place and/or working from home. Employers need to proactively identify potential problems and solutions. Cross-functional partnership at the leadership level will help ensure the workforce is physically and psychologically prepared to return.

Policies and Procedures

Because of the pandemic, organizations likely allowed for flexibility in some work policies, which may require further adjustment upon return to a physical workspace. Actions surrounding these types of policies and procedures include the following:

- Confirm work status (e.g. active, working extended hours, working from home, on leave or furlough, change in hours, change in pay)
- Determine essential roles and protocols around a phased re-introduction of workers
- Review employment actions based on business need (furlough/layoff, hour/pay change)
- Review workers’ compensation procedures as related to COVID-19
- Assess employee travel policies, who is eligible to travel, and ways to track if employees are visiting a region/city where there are outbreaks or risks of exposure
- Consider reporting policies and mandatory 14-day quarantine for employees who travel for personal reasons (e.g. vacation) to high risk regions/countries
- Review work from home policies and provide instructions and tools for ergonomic setups
- Assess leave and PTO policies
- Review infection detection and reporting procedures and methods for tracking
- Develop a plan to reintegrate employees who have recovered from COVID-19
- Navigate the concerns for higher risk populations or consider how to phase in high-risk employee profiles (e.g. over 50 years old, known medical conditions that are at higher risk) following EEOC guidance on protected classes
- Resolve potential liabilities (e.g., work from home flexibility vs. return to work requirements, access to professional development for work from home employees, etc.)
- Consider allowing employees, where possible, to wear personal face coverings at work (check with applicable local and state requirements)

- Review reasonable accommodation program guidelines

Management of Change

Most employees will likely expect there to be changes in policies, protocols, and even the physical workspace following the pandemic shutdown. The following actions may be considered to reduce anxiety about returning to work and ensure that employees know what to expect:

- Maintain timely and frequent communication with employees about policy and design changes
- Cross-train workers to perform essential functions so the workplace can operate even if key workers are absent
- Solicit open feedback on challenges and take action, as appropriate, while communicating back to the employee explaining the rationale as to why or why not action was taken
- Convey in detail why certain protocol and design changes were adopted
- Provide virtual work support to encourage continued virtual collaboration
- Engage in virtual training to introduce employees to new protocols and patterns of behavior before they return to a physical workplace and ensure a method for acknowledgment that the training has been completed prior to returning to the workplace
- Inform and train employees in any new organizational roles and responsibilities that have been instituted as precautionary measures against reinfection
- Develop cross-training plans for potential fluctuation in the workforce (i.e., employees out for quarantine periods) to ensure business continuity, and communicate appropriately to help employees understand why
- Develop a process to effectively track employees who may be out for an extended period, and their tentative return dates for continuity purposes
- Develop plans for crucial leadership continuity should leaders be impacted and out of office due to COVID-19.
- Create a web page for employees dedicated to COVID-19 (e.g., internal memos, pay codes, EAP/HR links, etc.) and keep it updated

Communication Considerations

Ensuring effective and timely communication to facilitate return to work

Effective, timely and frequent communication is necessary to create the shared sense of safety and security among a workforce and ease the process of returning to work. In addition to including the details of the transition, a communications plan should anticipate employee concerns and questions. The right communication tactics can exhibit enhanced caring from leadership and help employees practice better awareness of their surroundings for physical distancing and more. Below are several factors for organizations to consider when developing a comprehensive change management communications strategy.

Instructions for Arrival

In order for employees to return to a workplace, many organizations may institute screening (through self-assessments, symptom checks and temperature checks) to clear employees for entry into a building or site, in addition to other new entrance policies. Communication should be explicit and clear so employees know what to expect when arriving back on site.

- Outline new entrance protocols for employees and visitors, including how, when and where screenings will take place (may need to be mailed to employees that do not have email addresses)
- Consider using simple, branded, visual signage as a straightforward approach to remind people to reduce their risk or let visitors know what your organization is doing
- Conduct demonstrations or training to introduce new behaviors to employees in anticipation of arrival back on site
- Provide instructions for bringing work equipment back into the facility and sanitizing items
- Alert employees to changes in the work environment (e.g., availability of meeting rooms, occupancy restrictions, relocation of work stations, etc. to allow for physical distancing)
- Describe how the facility or site was prepared for arrival of employees (e.g., cleaning and disinfecting)
- Leverage multiple communication channels to reach the audience including phone, app-based, video (e.g., Skype, Zoom), verbal, digital displays, speaker systems, flyers, posters, email and postal mail

Personnel and Policy Changes

Because of the pandemic, organizations likely allowed for flexibility in many work policies, all of which will have to be reassessed upon return to a physical workspace. To guard against subsequent waves of the virus, and to be better prepared for similar events, organizations will

likely create new roles and responsibilities for individuals. The following are some actions for communicating this information:

- Describe why certain groups or individuals were chosen to return to work, if using a phased approach
- Explain the rationale behind the creation of new roles/positions within the organization for handling the coronavirus
- Outline the new responsibilities for existing roles to ensure health and safety in the wake of the pandemic and how employees are expected to engage with the new roles
- Convey in detail why certain protocol and design changes were adopted
- Explain the benefits of returning to a shared work environment (e.g., increased productivity and innovation, access to shared equipment and network)

External Considerations

Raising awareness of the outside influences that can impact operations

As employers work to develop comprehensive continuation and/or return to work plans, changes in environmental and societal conditions outside of one's organizational control will need to be continually considered. As part of their efforts to address COVID-19 precautions, employers should develop protocols that can be adjusted based on external needs and shifts in policy, medical guidance and overall levels of community risk. These must be flexible and should be relative to city, county, state, and federal guidelines and levels of risk (e.g. infection growth rate, population density) , which may vary greatly in organizations with large footprints. By doing this, organizations can set themselves up for continued safe operations without needing to create new protocols in response to external influences.

Government Policies and Guidelines

An important consideration for return to work protocols is adhering to federal, state and local jurisdiction requirements for business operations and public interactions. Although federal executive orders mainly revolved around travel restrictions in and out of the country, the range of state by state and local jurisdiction mandates are wide. Therefore, employers should consider the following actions to keep up with changes in government policies related to COVID-19:

- Identify primary sources for government policy information (e.g., CDC, NIOSH, OSHA, National Governors Association, etc.) as well as sources for relevant state and local jurisdictions (e.g., county, township or city level ordinances)
- Regularly check for updates to government policy primary sources and assign responsibility for monitoring updates to a specific team or employee
- Consider the use of technology to assist in tracking policy information and regulatory changes and ensuring policy alignment and compliance
- Communicate any changes to organizational policy as a result of government mandates clearly and concisely to affected workers before and after policy change implementation
- Establish a system for tracking any required reporting data to government bodies, landlords or property management, and key corporate stakeholders

Community Risk

Because the coronavirus pandemic does not affect all locations equally, it is vital for employers to consider the specific exposure risks for the communities into which employees are returning. Therefore, employers should consider the following actions to keep their return to work protocols appropriate and safe for the communities in which they are operating.

- Monitor the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the community to assess for potential interaction of employees with confirmed cases to determine exposure risk
- Determine organizationally how community infection rates will impact self-assessment of exposure risk (e.g., very high, high, medium, low per [OSHA guidelines](#)) and put a plan in place for triggering any protocol changes based on local community spread
- Communicate any changes to organizational policy as a result of changes in community risk exposure clearly and concisely to affected workers before and after policy change

Framework for Levels of COVID-19 Response Protocols

To keep from creating new protocols from scratch in the face of changing external factors, employers should consider developing a phased or leveled approach to their return to work protocols. Although it is difficult to predict the state of the world in the future, employers who consider a leveled response will have a better chance at adapting to new restrictions efficiently with fewer pain points for their employees. Although the number of levels may vary for different organizations (e.g., full pandemic restrictions vs. limited pandemic restrictions vs. mission critical operations vs. new normal operations) the following aspects of the different levels should be considered:

- Identify who will determine the tolerable level of organization exposure risk for each level of operation and be prepared to shift levels based on risk exposure by performing a risk assessment
- Consider health and safety protocols appropriate for each level of operation (e.g., cleaning protocols, vulnerable risk groups, physical distancing, hygiene requirements, entrance screening, trace testing, critical workers who can't socially distance)
- Consider travel and meeting protocols appropriate for each level of operation (e.g., virtual vs. in-person meetings, mission-critical travel vs. opportunistic travel, site visitors)

References

In addition to the publicly available sources listed below, the NSC SAFER research team reviewed over 25 COVID-19 response playbooks from organizations in power generation, utilities, construction, manufacturing, chemical, oil and gas, and transportation industries. Information will be continually updated as more resources and playbooks become available to the research team.

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SAFER Task Force Members

ABSA International	Chemours
AECOM	City of Chesapeake (VA)
Ameren	City of Phoenix (AZ)
American Automobile Association	City of Sacramento (CA)
American Chemistry Council	ContourGlobal
American College of Occupational & Environmental Medicine	Cosette Pharmaceuticals
American Contractors Insurance Group	COVE: Center of Visual Expertise
American Industrial Hygiene Association	Cummins
American Petroleum Institute	Cushman & Wakefield
American Society of Safety Professionals	Day & Zimmermann
American Staffing Association	Department of the Navy
American Trucking Association	Dow
Associated General Contractors	Edison Electric Institute
Avetta	Electric Power Research Institute
BNSF	Employee Assistance Professionals Assoc.
Board of Certified Safety Professionals	ERM
Boston Consulting Group	FirstGroup
Captive Resources	Grainger
Cementos Progreso	HR Source
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (NC)	Industrial Scientific & Intelx Technologies
	Infectious Diseases Society of America

SAFER

Safe Actions For Employee Returns



International Safety Equipment Association

ISN

ISSA - Worldwide Cleaning Industry

Association

Jacobs

Kennedy Forum Illinois

Krause Bell Group

Manufacturers Alliance for Productivity and

Innovation

McDonald's

Michael Best & Friedrich, LLP

NASA

National Association of Realtors

NIOSH – CDC

NSC Chapter Network

NSC Divisions & Delegates

Nutrien

ORCHSE Strategies, LLC

Owens Corning

Parsons

Pysch Hub

Recreation Vehicle Industry Association

Retail Industry Leaders Association

Safe States Alliance

Sodexo

Terex

Uber

United Rentals

U.S. Chamber of Commerce

US Steel

USG

Walgreens

Waymo

WorkCare