

Employee Safety: Maintaining Health Measures post-COVID

July 30, 2021



As we prepare for a post-COVID world, what new safety measures should businesses maintain to ensure the good health of their employees?



Soft focus to scan air leak test of HEPA filter

by Marshal Sterio, CEO, Surgically Clean Air



In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic brought about sweeping upheaval across all walks of life. We gained a new appreciation of going out and of human contact, got used to masks and social distancing, and for many, the workplace came home from the office.

But not for everyone, and certainly not for many workers in warehouses and factories. Many industrial jobs were deemed essential, and employees in such positions had to keep coming to work, where at first they faced a truly staggering rate of infection. Outbreaks were common in factories, workshops, and warehouses until management implemented changes meant to promote worker safety. From PPE to social distancing to staggered shifts, these measures helped prevent outbreaks and saved lives. With immunization rates rising, what lessons do we take from the pandemic and what safety measures do we keep in place to ensure the ongoing health, productivity, and prosperity of our workforce?

For one thing, it is important to stress that the danger of COVID-19 has not yet fully passed. New and more dangerous mutations of the novel coronavirus such as the delta strain may prove resistant to vaccines. And until enough people are vaccinated to achieve herd immunity, even the vaccinated themselves are only as safe as their dose and protective measures make them. While this dangerous illness is not entirely contained, no business should fully relax its protective regulations. PPE should be worn and social distancing rules observed at all times, plus staggered schedules and maximum occupancies continue to be a good idea.

Still, it is not too much to assume that the coronavirus will fade as a legitimate threat to health and productivity. When that day comes, businesses will be able to scale back their safety protocols. The enforced wearing of masks and gloves can come to an end, and so can mandatory social distancing. Industrial work can be tiring and physically intensive, and masks make breathing more difficult while gloves worn for long periods of time, especially when perspiring, can be bad for the skin. Likewise, the human element and socialization are important ways to cope with the monotony of work and build morale, and masks tend to create an artificial distance and tension, as does social distancing.

Being able to work more comfortably and without protective equipment is a benefit of the post-COVID era, but there were many changes adopted during the pandemic that we would be wise to keep in place. COVID-19 brought a new focus on cleanliness, for example, and there is no reason why such standards should be lowered. Mandatory extended hand-washing is a great step, especially in a factory or warehouse setting where germs can stick to the dirt and oil that coats workers' hands. Likewise, regular wipe-downs of all work surfaces should help prevent the transmission of illnesses of all sorts. After all, a cold going around the workshop is less dangerous than COVID, but still disruptive.

The pandemic also taught us that workers who feel sick for any reason should absolutely stay home, as one sick person in the workplace can quickly spiral into a widespread outbreak that shuts an entire facility down. For the sake of employers and their employees' wellbeing, we should learn from the pandemic to stop pressuring people to work sick, or even allowing them to do so.

Business owners should also take steps to protect their employees from illness by investing in new technology. Many businesses countered the pandemic by replacing or upgrading their

HVAC systems with the latest air cycling and filtration technology. Filtration systems can cleanse the air of the droplets primarily responsible for transporting the COVID virus from infected to uninfected people, keeping everyone in the facility safe from tainted particles.

COVID-19 is not the last dangerous illness that could impact our warehouses and workshops. Even as it retreats into history, it is vital that we take this opportunity to maintain the good habits we have adopted to better prepare for the next crisis. Even if such a crisis doesn't arise for a long time, there is no downside to making industrial centers safer and more sanitary. A company's workers are its lifeblood, and keeping them safe from illness isn't just good business and good management. It's also the moral thing to do.



Marshal Sterio

Marshal Sterio is the CEO of Surgically Clean Air Inc., a Toronto-based manufacturer of portable systems that purify air by supplementing existing HVAC systems. The company's products are market leaders in dental practices currently being used in over 45,000 dental offices, and are used by Fortune 500 companies, Major League Baseball clubs, the NBA, the NHL and thousands of other organizations.
