

Strategies for Reopening your Workplace



The COVID-19 pandemic has tested organizational resilience and left incalculable emotional, social, economic and supply chain impacts in its wake.

The institutional fabric of health, safety and security that employees have always trusted has and will continue to be challenged with the uncertainty and unpredictability of the ongoing pandemic. Yet, one day people will return to work, and organizational leaders planning this return will face pressures of ensuring the safety and well-being of their workforce as well as their organization's resilience. Organization must incorporate state and local public health requirements in their specific business restart strategies. The pandemic is ongoing, and organizations must prepare for a second wave and the associated implications.

Well before the pandemic, BSI has been helping its clients to improve their organizational resilience. Since the onset of the COVID-19, BSI has been supporting its clients, including critical and essential organizations such as hospitals, with managing the ongoing business disruptions and worker risks. This includes providing guidance on emergency functions across disciplines that drive incident response. BSI's expertise is uniquely positioned to support enterprise-level and location-specific decision-making in addition to the development of plans and protocols that enable employers to re-open their facilities in a safe, effective manner.

Dimensions of Business Resilience



Organizational Resilience

BSI's global consultancy has experts ready to provide guidance and support for both tactical incident response needs as well as strategic continuity plans that can minimize impacts for future waves of COVID-19 and other hazards that may impact your organization. Our consultants advise that preparing to resume work operations can be a good time to begin developing or refining your plan because there is a clear view of what services are essential to the organization and what infrastructure is required to support their operations.

As sites and operations look to reopen, it will be important to consider the following strategies:

- 1. Critical Supply Chain Elements** - Identify the minimum elements of the organizations and supply chain that need to remain intact to keep the company running, and if those functions need to be covered onsite, can be transferred to other sites or suppliers, or be addressed remotely. This may include strategies such as cross-training staff on essential functions or duplicating infrastructure in secondary/tertiary locations and the supply chain.
- 2. Controllable Risks** - Understand the risks to the business that can be controlled and how to best control/mitigate them. This includes documenting possible impacts to the business that are outside of the organization's control that may impact operations such as mandated closures and a changing landscape of government-based requirements.



Organizational Resilience – cont'd

3. **Critical Business Partners** - Understand what areas of the business are reliant upon vendors, suppliers, and other parties, and assess their risks.
4. **Adaptability to Change** - Assess the flexibility of the organization to meet changing consumer demands. This includes changing the type of service offered to meet the needs of the incident or supporting sectors outside of your current customer base.
5. **Building Re-occupancy Criteria and Supply Chain** - Identify the criteria to prioritize the building re-occupancy and re-starting the supply chain. This may include postponing or rescheduling start-up of non-essential operations/facilities that may place employees at higher risk. Understand how your suppliers can function with limited capacity.
6. **Create Crisis Management Team** - Establish a Crisis Management Team to guide decision-making and response actions for the incident. This team should be multi-disciplinary, have the authority to make decisions/ implement policy, and be supported by executive leadership.
7. **Regular Communications** - Establishing a communications cadence with staff and suppliers to provide updates on expectations for resuming operations and changes to organizational culture.
8. **Train Staff** - Provide training to staff regarding changes to the working environment and work processes.
9. **Anticipate Future Waves of Covid-19** - Assess the strengths and areas for improvement from the organizational response and use those findings to develop and update plans as needed in anticipation of potential future waves of COVID-19.
10. **Test and Validate** - Test continuity plans and procedures to validate planning assumptions and uncover plan limitations.

The scope of their work should include:

- Supporting essential services/functions
- Prioritization of office re-opening for essential and non-essential services
- Communicating with and working with suppliers as needed
- Programs/policy for maintaining a safe working environment for anyone working onsite
- Identifying parameters for escalating or de-escalating incident response
- Coordinating the flow of information up to executive leadership and down to staff and suppliers.



Health and Safety

As organizations prepare to return to the workplace, employers will need to ensure a safe working environment for their employees, customers, contractors, and visitors to enable a smooth and confident recovery. BSI's Health and Safety subject matter experts have strong technical knowledge combined with real world experience across a multitude of industries, which can help support you during recovery. BSI can assist your organization by identifying and assessing the risks and selecting the right mitigation strategies for all of your stakeholders.

These risk assessment and mitigation strategies can be further adopted as part of an ISO 45001 Occupational Health and Safety Management System framework, which is designed to reduce the risk of health and safety hazards in the workplace including biological hazards such as SARS-COV-2. The ISO 45001 framework represents international best practice in health and safety risk management.



As offices look to reopen, it will be important to consider the following strategies:

1. **Classify Covid-19 Exposure Risk** - Create a procedure for assessing and classifying COVID-19 exposure risk for all workers based on job functions and other applicable stakeholders to determine the appropriate workplace controls needed. There are various existing risk models that can be adopted including one published by Federal OSHA and/or use your organization's existing risk assessment approaches for conducting job hazard assessments.

Workplace controls should emphasize engineering controls such as barriers and administrative controls such as physical distancing due to an anticipated, ongoing shortage of PPE. Identify the criteria to prioritize the building re-occupancy and re-starting the supply chain. This may include postponing or rescheduling start-up of non-essential operations/facilities that may place employees at higher risk. Understand how your suppliers can function with limited capacity.

2. **Policy for Vulnerable Workers** - Work with the Human Resources group to establish a policy for vulnerable (at-risk) workers to self-report and allow for special/alternative work accommodations. Establish work schedules to stagger and rotate employees as necessary using remote and virtual work platforms, sequencing of work, and multiple and flexible work shifts.
3. **Criteria for Re-Occupancy of Buildings** - Create a plan and identify the criteria to prioritize the re-occupancy of your buildings. This may include postponing or rescheduling start-up of non-essential operations/facilities that may place employees at higher risk such as cafeteria/food preparation services, exercise rooms/gyms, break/lunchroom seating areas, and large gatherings such as all-hands meetings. In the case of food services, establish strict safety protocols and consider providing limited choices such as pre-packaged box lunches for in-house café/kitchen operation (if these services are deemed essential).

4. **Identify Network of Essential Providers** - Establish a network of essential service and material providers including expert EHS consultants, medical health advisors, clinical testing labs and services, essential PPE suppliers.
5. **Social Distancing Policy** - Establish a robust physical/social distancing policy and reconfigure workspaces to support the requirements. Nominate physical/social distancing champions to promote the effort. Provide ergonomics support to remote worker population or employees.
6. **Inspect HVAC** - Inspect and maintain your building's heating, ventilation, air-conditioning (HVAC) to ensure that the HVAC system is configured to provide adequate outdoor air and suitable building air changes.
7. **Communication** - Establish an effective system for keeping employees informed on essential company and public-health related information. The system should also allow for employees to ask questions and report critical information such as developing COVID-19-related symptoms to the right individuals. In addition, implement facility cleaning and decontamination plans and ensure internal emergency response teams and first aid responders are properly trained on universal precautions and protection against COVID-19.
8. **Training and Awareness Program** - Provide a re-onboarding training and awareness campaign for employees to bring awareness and understanding of the policies and procedures that will be implemented by the employer. The training should include how the employer is managing risk, the expectations of employees, system to report critical information, and resources that are available for further assistance, questions, etc. Additional employee training may be required where new risks are introduced and procedures, operations, PPE requirements have changed.

9. Facility Cleaning and Decontamination Plan - Implement facility cleaning and decontamination plans and hand-washing facilities focusing on high traffic areas based on approved guidelines.

10. Create a Covid-19 Task Force - Create a COVID-19 Task Force to serve as advisor to executives or leadership and support decision-making on company policy and response action.

The task force should be tasked with responding to and establishing/ updating policy and protocol for:

- Employee complaints and concerns
- Total Worker Health which includes physical and mental well-being
- Monitoring local, state, federal, health agency/department, and customer requirements
- Essential and non-essential work activities/operations
- Training/awareness
- Employee screening for COVID-19
- Managing suspect COVID-19 exposures
- Return to work following confirmed exposure/positive test
- Employee surveillance and contact tracing
- Requirements for customers, contractors, visitors
- Supply Chain requirements
- Leverage external expert consultants to assist where there are resource or knowledge gaps with internal Task Force.



Environmental

Mastering organizational resiliency demands an organization provides the continuity of operation both internally in the workplace with facility readiness, and externally with environmental waste programs or permits that may have been impacted as a result of Covid-19. Complying with environmental permit requirements is a critical function for operational resilience.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 impacts made complying with permit requirements challenging. If properly documented and reported, worker shortages, travel restrictions, and unavailability to critical subcontracted support are potential areas for enforcement discretion for non-compliances with permit requirements. Utilizing BSI's subject matter expertise to navigate the nuances of state and federal permitting noncompliance discretions can ease the laborious task of reporting when returning to the "new normal" is possible. Returning to the "new normal" will also entail dealing with the new reality that the COVID-19 pandemic is leaving behind a growing legacy of wastes.

From agricultural spoils, to healthcare and pharmaceutical wastes, and waste products created from idled manufacturing processes, COVID-19-related wastes abound, and resilient organizations will have compliant waste management programs. Did COVID-19-related business activities cause episodic generation of wastes for your organization? Often very small quantity or small quantity generators of wastes do not realize that episodic generation requires reporting and short-term waste category changes. BSI's waste expertise can ease the daunting task of understanding the classification, managing, disposal, and reporting of wastes, as well as, be a valuable partner to assess third-party waste vendors compliance waste handling and disposal requirements.

Further, the ISO 14001 standard provides the framework for an organization's operations to meet environmental regulations and improve efficiency and reduce environmental impact while driving performance.



Information Solutions

As organizations prepare to reopen, it is incumbent upon them to institute a whole new set of governance measures to ensure employee safety is being monitored. As such, documenting internal policies on workplace safety and prevention strategies for governance will be important as a risk management tool and critical to information resilience.

Monitoring your organization's performance against plan is a critical component in ensuring resilience. Existing systems can be quickly leveraged to support office reopening strategies that will help in data collection, centralization, and trend analysis. In addition to basic compliance documentation, these systems can be leveraged to make real-time business decision to protect the workforce, the environment and even the financial stability of an organization.

BSI's information solutions team can help you augment your existing platforms to support recovery. Our experts can also deploy key BSI-owned platforms to enable resilience, including the enterprise governance, risk and compliance system Entropy™.



Cybersecurity

The rapid spread of COVID-19 left many organizations scrambling to support work from home orders and with outdated business continuity plans. As a result, many saw VPN capacity surge to support remote users. Critical network services were reconfigured to support this new working model.

And some leaders found themselves subscribing to cloud-based services to keep their organizations operational. As we begin the recovery process it's important to maintain existing cybersecurity practices, assess configuration changes, and to review policies and procedures in need of refresh to mitigate risk to the organization. Continue with your Cybersecurity best practices and encourage your users to be on the lookout for increased threats. We're seeing a 30% increase in phishing attacks and our defenses are being tested constantly, so remain diligent.

Other things to consider are the use of password managers or single sign-on (SSO) solutions. While working remote use the VPN especially when using public Wi-Fi. Make sure your anti-virus is up-to-date, that it updates regularly from anywhere, and it provides blocking, logging and alerting. It's also a good time to consider an IT Risk Assessment to evaluate recent changes to system and network configurations and for any shadow IT that may have been deployed during the crisis. Call from a free consultation if we can be of assistance.

References:

- Recovering from COVID-19 Building Closures, American Industrial Hygiene Association (2020) (https://aiha-assets.sfo2.digitaloceanspaces.com/AIHA/resources/Public-Resources/RecoveringFromCOVID-19BuildingClosures_GuidanceDocument.FINAL.pdf)
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) - <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- World Health Organization (WHO) - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>



About BSI

For more than 100 years, BSI has been helping businesses in 195 countries prepare for, respond to, and recover from disruptions of all kinds. All our capabilities are developed and implemented in line with international best practice standards and are aligned with local regulatory requirements specific to their region.

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