

AVEM Roundtable Notes:

Manufacturing Practices During COVID

May 20, 2020

The following are observations made by participants of the AVEM Roundtable held on May 20, 2020, to discuss “Manufacturing Practices During COVID.”

Policies

- There are many governmental mandates, but there is little direction on how to meet the mandate. In addition, some mandates do make sense for some businesses.
- Companies have a responsibility to not only follow government guidelines but have a responsibility to keep their employees and companies safe and that may require the company to do more than the guidelines suggest.
- One participant asked, “Without absolute clear guidance from the CDC, states or other government entities, do companies have a liability if someone gets sick and how is it proven that the illness was contracted in the work environment?” Participants agreed that these are unanswered questions that companies review and discuss with their legal counsel.
- One participant noted that it is probably best for companies to actively seek best practices from CDC and others and follow those practices to demonstrate that the company is maintaining a workplace that has the employee’s best interests. Companies should document these efforts.
- Companies need to communicate with employees that the company’s actions are for the “whole team.” Policies being implemented are not implemented for individuals.
- One participant stated that their company reminds employees that there are new requirements for being in a workplace and employees that cannot comply are not allowed to come to in to work. The company makes the requirements equal across its facilities worldwide. They review all requirements mandated by counties and regions where they have facilities and implement the most conservative policies in all facilities to create a global company policy. They remind employees that “this is about you and keeping you safe.”
- One participant noted that their policy included having an employee work from if a member of the family is symptomatic. The employee must stay out for 14 days post the end of the symptoms.
- Hold shop meetings outdoors when the weather is good. People can social distance.
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Gloves/PPE/Disinfecting Workspaces

- Participants discussed the use of gloves. One company put tissue dispensers and trash cans by things that are frequently touched to make it easy and convenient for employees to use the tissue to touch the item and then immediately put it in the trash.
- One company uses gloves in shipping department because of the boxes coming in and out.
- It was noted that people tend to think gloves are an additional protection. With gloves on, people don’t wash hands as often. For this reason, one participant’s company does not use gloves. Instead, they have eliminated coffee corners and put in one-shot coffee dispensers. Disinfectant wipe stations are located throughout the facility near things that are touched. Personnel are reminded to wipe before and after they touch a common item. And, an additional person was hired to clean common areas and high touch areas several times a day.
- Most participants noted that there are constant reminders to wash hands and disinfect with wipes.

- It was noted by several of the participants that employees are getting more comfortable. Staff using PPE are getting closer every day it is used. They go from being 6 feet apart, to 4 to 3. It has become necessary to remind employees daily about social distancing.
- One company has staggered work times and further separated the employees.
- One company is not opening packages received until 24 hours after delivery. Another company is spraying the packages with disinfectant and then opening. They recognize that the contents of the package should be fine because of the time taken for travel to the destination.
- Slowly but surely people are getting more comfortable and starting to ignore rules. Employees and society are becoming more complacent. Worry that if someone gets sick, it could shut down the company. 80% of transmission are in an enclosed space so outdoor meetings are better.

Teleworking Practices

- Several of the participants noted that they are holding internal meetings with teleworking software even when employees are in the office to keep employees from congregating in one room.
- For those working from home, it is important to have a dedicated workspace and have a routine that sets up the workday. For many, setting up the day like you are going into work is the best. Also, those working at home need to remember to take breaks or they will burn out.
- In Europe there is a safety compliance sheet for work at home. One company uses it and gives employees a sheet that recommends a “work at home environment.”
- One company noted that employees are getting work done from home. While work-from-home had not been allowed before, it is being proven as a concept.
- Employees are working from home but coming in when needed. This is happening without workers being told. They recognize when it is necessary.
- Those afraid of teleworking in the past, are now seeing the benefit of it. This is changing attitudes. Some days you have to be in the office. Some days, the work can be done anywhere. Employees have always worked when on the road. This is the same concept. Attitudes are changing.
- It was shared that Kate Lister, president of Global Workplace Analytics, has also written, “When clients ask, ‘How will I know if they’re working?’” I ask, ‘How do you know they are working now?’ You know employees are working based on their production.

Future Workforce

- This is going to change our business as we go forward. There will be a distributed workforce.
- One company had a hard-fast policy of no work from home. They are changing policies permanently because the company has seen that implementing some work from home will work with the culture.
- This change is not for the moment. It is for the long-term.
- Kate Lister, president of Global Workplace Analytics, has written “Our best estimate is that 25-30% of the workforce will be working from-home multiple days a week by the end of 2021.”
- For the future we need to de-couple supply chains and have diversification of suppliers. There has been too much reliance on single sourcing and/or specific regional sourcing.
- The future will see shop floor changes that guarantees more separation of employees. Companies will need to figure out the balance and how to maximize square footage.
- One company has people in the shop on a regular basis that are 6 feet or more apart. They stay in their spot. If they move, they have to put on a mask. Because of this distancing, this company has only changed policies for lunchroom and public spaces.