As businesses across the country begin to reopen in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic, undoubtedly new disinfection, cleaning, and sanitization procedures will need to be put in place to assure the health and safety of customers and employees. We asked three industry leaders – architect Timothy Hawk, commercial flooring services provider Thomas Holland and real estate developer Jonathan Willette - what the “new normal” for these businesses looks like, and they offer recommendations to help businesses provide the safest possible environments moving forward.

**For businesses that have been completely closed due to the Coronavirus pandemic, what changes do you believe should be implemented to insure customer and staff safety once they're allowed to reopen?**

**Timothy Hawk:** All businesses should reconsider their furniture configuration and policies related to the way employees occupy the workplace. All workstations should ensure six foot of separation between employees. If workers are able to avoid facing one another, that is ideal, but if that is not possible, it is recommended to introduce screens to limit the spread of germs. Companies should strive to assign dedicated workstations to individuals and avoid sharing or “hoteling” protocols. Additionally tight access aisles (less than ten feet) should be marked as one-way circulation. It is important that every effort is made to keep employees separated from one another to support social distancing protocols.

The occupancy of all conference rooms and other forms of collaborative space should be reduced to allow workers and their visitors to maintain appropriate separation as well. These new protocols will put pressure on the existing real estate footprint for most organizations, and since most employers will not be able to add additional square footage, companies may have to consider a reduction in the number of workers on-site. Best estimates indicate that perhaps as many as 25% of employees will need to work from home to support the various demands. If this is not possible, then employers may need to adopt staggered work schedules.

Bottom line, business owners will need to decrease the density of floorplates.

**Thomas Holland:** We have a whole floor care guide at www.goapex.com/guide that may be helpful. In short, we recommend that for initial re-occupancy, they change their cleaning protocols for carpet care to:

1. change all vacuums to HEPA filters
2. replace normal "interim" or "low moisture" cleaning with deep cleaning, which entails pre-vacuuming, pre-spray and agitate, then hot water extraction at 160 degree water. Normal janitorial cleaning should continue with an emphasis on high traffic touchpoints being cleaned more frequently. Supplemental disinfecting should be done as needed. it's very important to realize that surfaces must be cleaned before they can be disinfected.

**Jon Willette:** No one can tell what business will look like or how the designs will be altered in the near and long time future. The only thing I do know is that all businesses must make their customers and employees feel safe. With this said, we are suggesting to customers a -Safe Clean- program. We work with our customers to establish a program that fits their type of business and building. For example, we are working with large office buildings and suggest AT LEAST once a month deep complete clean, covering all areas of the building, with Vital Oxide deployed by fogging or high pressure spray. Then, weekly tune ups of the common areas. Between foggings the employee is to maintain their area (desk, office, cube…).

 It is also important to establish -Dirty to Clean- areas. Restrict customers, if possible, to certain areas of the facility, lobby and entry areas for example. This way you can control outside contamination better. Employees should enter from one direction and go through a “dirty to clean” room. The process should try and eliminate as much contaminant from the outside entering the facility as possible. Some choose, changing, cleaning or putting booties on shoes, removing coats, washing hands and such. Of course each business and building is a bit different. Changing shoes may be more important to a daycare where little ones are crawling on the floor than a manufacturing plant.

**For essential businesses that have been open but may have been operating with a smaller staff during the pandemic, what safety precautions and recommendations do you have once they're back at full employee capacity?**

**Timothy Hawk:** Smaller, agile team members who have been working to serve an essential function will need to modify their behavior to accommodate the increased density. Additionally, new visitor policy will need to be introduced. Essential workers will have become accustomed to the adjustments to the workplace, but those returning to work, visitors, and guests will add a new wrinkle. It seems obvious that some of these essential worker processes may need to be adapted to accommodate the increased density.

**Thomas Holland:**

* Keep physical distancing (we don't like using social distancing...we need to remain social) by staggering shifts, if possible.
* Keep bathrooms limited to every other stall.
* Forego coffee service and other break room amenities for now.
* Employees should be responsible for cleaning and disinfecting their own space, while they are in their space.

**Jon Willette:** We all need to follow the government guidelines and simple common sense. Assuming the businesses are cleaning properly each “new” employee needs to be onboarded again and understand the rules of engagement for fighting this virus. Establish a health and safety person or team that is focused on the health and safety of your employees and customers. Not only will it be good to focus on but will help to make everyone feel safer.

One issue is, some people are not taking it seriously, this has to be corrected as soon as possible within companies. If customers do not think you are being safe they will move on. Also it is important to look at your business as your customer does. Does the property look clean and tidy? Even if the landlord is responsible for cleaning, make sure it happens. For the near term, people will simply not come in if they feel it is dirty.

**What are the most basic procedures that you believe any business should be implementing to safeguard staff and customers?**

**Timothy Hawk:** The old-school idea of a dedicated, full-time receptionist will become important once again. It seems to be a basic requirement that a receptionist will need to greet and screen workers, visitors, and guests. Many of the former office protocols which were typical in the mid-19th century, will need to be resurrected. These designs and procedures supported a culture of control and efficiency, which is now once again essential. Many of our workplaces had migrated to a more casual atmosphere and the idea of a receptionist had faded. Now, when safety is critical, a dedicated gatekeeper, with a sign-in procedure and other safety protocols will be important.

**Thomas Holland:**

* Keep surfaces cleaned, with an emphasis on high traffic touchpoints.
* Add supplemental disinfection.
* Be very aware of the disinfectants being used in facilities. Some N-List disinfectants are very harmful to surfaces and humans. Use NSF certified, CRI certified, 0.0.0.0 HMIS rated products.

**Jon Willette:** We think the Safe Clean procedure we talked about before and washing hands.

**What specific industries or types of businesses need to include additional measures to assure safety for everyone entering their facility? What are those additional procedures?**

**Timothy Hawk:** Many of our manufacturing and processing facilities already have stringent entry protocols, so I don’t see a huge need to modify these situations. But, it seems that all types of facilities should adopt screening procedures supported by a secure reception area and an ample waiting area and many will need to address this critical need. Any facility which supports person-to-person commerce (banks, shops, salons, etc.) may want to introduce greeters who help transition consumers to their experience. Office environments may need to be redesigned to reintroduce reception stations at pivotal points throughout their facility, and this will require either additional staff or shared responsibility for existing staffers.

**Thomas Holland:** 24 hour call centers, high occupancy buildings, parts manufacturing or sorting warehouses.

Temperature checks should be mandatory, color coded bracelets for "safe" employees, and masks should be worn in work stations.

**Jon Willette:** Everyone!

**In the wake of the pandemic, do you believe businesses will need to incorporate disinfection and sanitization into their maintenance routines? If so, how often - daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly? What should those procedures include?**

**Timothy Hawk:** Sanitization protocols and daily maintenance will be critical. Business owners may need to reconsider the durability and maintenance of their flooring, wall finishes, and furniture systems. Scrubbable hard surfaces will be preferred to maintain a sense of cleanliness and safety. We may consider extending the types of materials that many of our medical facilities have utilized for years into our retail and professional working environments. Cleaning and maintenance of these surfaces will need to increase. Many workplaces have been supported by a light, daily cleaning and a more thorough, deeper cleaning protocol weekly. I sense that the frequency of deep cleaning protocols will increase. Shared restroom spaces and kitchenettes will need to be cleaned daily. Additionally, employers should require individual employees to wipe down their workstation surfaces before they depart each day. Conference room tables should also be wiped clean after each use. Cleaning protocols for any surface frequently touched by many employees will need to change.

**Thomas Holland:** They should consider it, but be very mindful of what they are using and how it is applied. There are no products on the market that have lasting "kill" claims that are on the N-List or even proven against viruses per the EPA. Disinfecting will only work if a surface is clean and only for as long as it takes for someone to re-contaminate the surface. It is only cost effective for facilities if they are incorporating the disinfecting along with other services such as carpet cleaning.

**Jon Willette:** For sure, think about the restaurants you go to for carry out. Our clients that focused on cleanliness prior to the pandemic have done the best. You need to have a safe system to go from dirty to clean and healthy doses of Vital Oxide in the infrastructure on which this is based.

**Based on your job role, what other insights, suggestions, and/or precautions can you offer to business owners who are looking to reopen after the pandemic?**

**Timothy Hawk:** It seems that many of the technologies that we have used throughout stay-at-home orders are here to stay. Now, more than ever, individual mobile devices will be critical to maintain the efficient flow of work. Many of our peers may be forced to balance family demands since access to our schools, summer camps, and day care centers will be restricted. Some workers may need to support a nomadic existence, where they can quickly pack up their working tools and take them home. Business owners may want to set aside resources to help these individual mobile devices to be supported in the workplace with mobile or fixed large-format displays. Workers, who have become accustomed to sharing their screen through collaborative software solutions will anticipate that this can extend into the physical environment seamlessly.

**Thomas Holland:** Here is a webinar we hosted that is very comprehensive.

**Jon Willette:** You MUST make your customers and employees feel safe!