Will workplace health and safety provide your license to operate?

Occupational health and safety risk management in non-traditional times

> "Organisations will need to demonstrate to governments, regulators and communities that they are effectively managing risks in order to continue, or to restart, operations"

Effective risk controls

As always, it is important to consult with your people – including employees, contractors and volunteers where relevant – when updating or preparing your WHS plan. Workers may know good ways to control risks, or else would correct control strategy that would not work well. And in this context they need to feel physically and psychologically safe at work (and possibly more than ever).

Can effective workplace health and safety management support industries to recover?

While the COVID-19 pandemic is far from over, we are turning our minds to recovery; however, we won't be returning to business as usual. Social distancing, tracking and tracing, and border closures are likely to continue until the virus is behind us. As most industries **have merely demonstrated** their resilience, organisations will need to consider what the "new normal" will be, and how they will protect their employees, contractors and customers from COVID-19 related risks while rebuilding or maintaining their businesses. Leaders need to plan to bounce forward into new normal.

Each workplace should already have a work health and safety (WHS) plan or framework in place which outlines how hazards are managed and the processes which keep workers safe. However, development of a comprehensive WHS plan which clearly outlines how workers and the community will be protected in the context of management of and recovery from the global pandemic is essential. Though **the government of Azerbaijan has not yet expressed its strict expectations from organizations relating to the recovery phase and no proper guidelines/regulatory standards are available**, the absence of a carefully considered plan for a "return to work" may put an organisation's licence to operate at risk should the government, regulators or the community determine the organisation is putting its people or the community at risk.

With so much focus on COVID-19, are some risks being overlooked?

As we need to transition into the recovery phase of COVID-19, we need to ensure that all risks are being adequately managed. We're all familiar with the traditional approach to managing risk: identify, assess and control, and consult and communicate with employees. But with the primary focus on reducing COVID-19 transmission, are we missing some of the not so obvious risks? It is easy to lose sight of the other WHS risks that have emerged or increased from this pandemic. Some of the risks that should be front of mind include fatigue, **risks associated with a contingent workforce and the range of biopsychosocial risks.** It is critical that organisations revisit their WHS risk profile to ensure it not only captures new COVID-19 risk and controls, but to identify how "old" risks may have been impacted and any new risks.

Selecting the right controls amidst the uncertainty

In this rapidly changing and evolving landscape, organisations need to be regularly reviewing the effectiveness of controls. Organisations should rely on proven WHS risk management principles such as the hierarchy of control and workforce consultation to enable effective selection and implementation of suitable control measures – but be more agile in their application. In addition, organisations should ask:

► Is there evidence to confirm the control prevents or reduces the risk?

► Does the introduction of this control introduce a new risk to the business and if so how will this be managed?

► How have COVID-19 controls impacted pre-pandemic controls?

The better the question. The better the answer.
The better the world works.

Monitoring the health of workers

Critical to an ongoing licence to operate will be monitoring the health of employees. Organisations will need to establish a process for doing this (if they haven't already) to ensure they are safe to be in the workplace, and determine how this sensitive information is to be managed, monitored and accessed. Organisations should consider the need for tracing app per se. The ability to trace worker movements within your own facilities or offices, and have timely and reliable access to information will be important in the event of an infection in your workforce.

Do you trust that new and old controls are effective?

The need to demonstrate that controls are in place and working effectively may have never been so strong – organisations need to demonstrate to governments, regulators, customers, investors and communities that they are effectively managing risks in order to maintain a licence to operate.

While front line management will be critical to ensuring complacency doesn't creep in, a more formal assurance program with direct reporting to management and the Board will be necessary. As the body of knowledge about COVID-19 continues to grow, controls will need regular review, and information will need to be quickly fed to senior leaders to enable rapid and informed decision making and compliance with due diligence obligations.

Monitoring the effectiveness of other critical controls must also continue in order to identify any changes required to controls, and to be assured that risks other than those relating to COVID-19 continue to be managed – particularly while organisations and their people are distracted by the pandemic.

Physical distancing requirements may force organisations to think differently about how WHS auditing and assurance activities can continue. Remote auditing supported by mobile cameras and drones can be effective and efficient, and as restrictions lift some on-site auditing will be able to be performed.

An effective WHS assurance program should be included in your COVID-19 recovery plan; it will not only support improved risk management and compliance with WHS legislative obligations, but improve decision making at all levels to support organisations to survive now and thrive through recovery.

Communication is key

Once a WHS plan for recovery is agreed, it is critical to ensure the relevant people are made aware of it. This should include contractors, volunteers, and customers – not only your own employees. Key information must be communicated in a way which will be well understood – simple language, visual aids, and translations if considered necessary. Effective communication should also explain the 'why' people are being instructed to take specific action.

When it comes to managing WHS risks, it's almost never to set and forget – but now, even more so. In the context of COVID-19, knowledge and circumstances can change by the day. Make sure you're checking in with your people and reviewing the suitability and effectiveness of your WHS plan on a regular basis. In the early stages, this might even be as frequent as daily or weekly.

Resources sector as an example

Azerbaijan's resource sector is applying traditional OHS risk management principles to keep its workforce, families and communities safe and healthy and sites operating. Taking into account new, existing and emerging risks, a variety of controls should be implemented across the sector such as:

► Physical distancing and staggering of start, break and finish times and redirection of people streams to limit physical interactions

► Limiting the number of people at operational facilities to business critical employees and contractors only

► Providing alternative work options for vulnerable employees

► Regular health screenings and temperature checks at point of origin, transit and work sites

► Introducing a range of mental health and well being initiatives to boost resilience, connection with others, and build a sense of community

► Increased awareness and implementation of fatigue management controls to support roster changes

► Having a trace app and monitoring plans in place

► Isolation and case tracking plans and facilities in the event of an anomaly.

Governance and assurance programs should be in place to test whether controls are been implemented, effective, and if necessary require further improvement. This allows boards, executive teams and leadership to stay informed and enable them to make rapid and effective decisions as required.

Take action – NOW

The response to the immediate threats of COVID-19 is no longer taking precedence. The effective management of existing, new and emerging WHS risks and impacts remain a challenge for the coming months and years.

Have you identified all COVID-19 risks?

► Be open minded, consult with your workforce to determine all WHS risks

► Define your WHS risk profile specific to your operating context – the key risks relevant to your people whether they are working from home, or continuing to work in their usual workplace

► Consider both existing, new and emerging risks due to operational changes and new ways of working.

Are your controls appropriate and effective?

► Consult with your workforce and utilise the hierarchy of controls to determine effective controls

► Consider the performance requirements of the controls and how they could be verified

► Track progress and evaluate the effectiveness of controls seeking feedback from your people on what is/is not working

► Monitor effective implementation of identified controls through a robust assurance program.

Be agile and adaptive

► Revisit your risk profile on a regular basis in response to ongoing changes as the pandemic and control requirements evolve.

► Ensure appropriate reporting structures are in place to enable rapid and effective decision making during this evolving pandemic.

Need help?
EY health and safety professionals can assist you to develop and/or implement a WHS plan for "return to work" as workplaces adjust to "new normal" and move to recovery.

Contacts

To discuss further please contact your EY advisor:

Ilgar Veliyev

Managing Partner for EY Azerbaijan
Ilgar.Veliyev@az.ey.com

Artem Larin

Climate Change and Sustainability Services
Leader in Central Europe and the CIS
Artem.A.Larin@ru.ey.com

Gunel Farajova

Climate Change and Sustainability Services
Leader in Azerbaijan and Georgia
Gunel.Farajova@az.ey.com

EY | Assurance | Tax | Transactions | Advisory

About EY

EY is a global leader in assurance, tax, transaction and advisory services. The insights and quality services we deliver help build trust and confidence in the capital markets and in economies the world over. We develop outstanding leaders who team to deliver on our promises to all of our stakeholders. In so doing, we play a critical role in building a better working world for our people, for our clients and for our communities.

EY refers to the global organization, and may refer to one or more, of the member firms of Ernst & Young Global Limited, each of which is a separate legal entity. Ernst & Young Global Limited, a UK company limited by guarantee, does not provide services to clients. Information about how EY collects and uses personal data and a description of the rights individuals have under data protection legislation is available via ey.com/privacy. For more information about our organization, please visit ey.com.

Disclaimer

This communication provides general information which is current at the time of production. The information contained in this communication does not constitute advice and should not be relied on as such. Professional advice should be sought prior to any action being taken in reliance on any of the information. Ernst & Young disclaims all responsibility and liability (including, without limitation, for any direct or indirect or consequential costs, loss or damage or loss of profits) arising from anything done or omitted to be done by any party in reliance, whether wholly or partially, on any of the information. Any party that relies on the information does so at its own risk. Liability limited by a scheme approved under Professional Standards Legislation.

ey.com/az