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Jeff Fleischmann, PE

## Smart Building Environment Welcomes Employees Back

Whether they voice their uneasiness or not, employees are nervous about returning to the office. Their concerns range from the ventilation system to those high touch areas necessary to conduct business – the elevator, doors, and even the water fountain. Developing a plan and taking important steps that cultivate a smart building environment can put your staff at ease and promote the health and safety of your workforce. Taking precautions to protect your workforce does not have to cost a fortune and is a sound investment in your business. There are three areas of concern to most office workers: indoor air quality, safe water, and high touch surfaces they cannot avoid. Qualified professional engineers can assist you in addressing these concerns.

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### Indoor Air Quality

Decontamination and adequate ventilation are essential. Improvements to air quality can be made using ionization processes that produce no ozone. This will help to reduce airborne and surface pathogens in HVAC systems. If a facility has been shut down for some time, it should be evaluated for commissioning and humidification. Facilities that have been previously shut down should be re-commissioned to reduce the harmful effects of excessive humidity. Humidification systems should undergo evaluation to so measures can be taken to appropriately address dangerous bacteria. In all cases, filtration systems should be inspected, replaced, and/or upgraded as necessary.

### Water Systems

Safe water is essential to the reopening of an office. If your facility has been unoccupied for several months with an inactive water system, your system could potentially contain stagnant water with deadly bacteria such as Legionella. Testing and flushing your system are critical before your workforce returns. Knowing that monitoring is occurring can strengthen compliance with your policies. Additional security options such as touchless temperature screening also help foster a safe environment. Understanding and addressing the concerns of your employees is vital to returning to your workspace.; Contacting an experienced professional engineer to assist you, is a good start to discovering alternative solutions to meet the needs of your space, workforce, business and guests.

### High-touch Surfaces

For many, their biggest concern is around those frequently touched surfaces in every office – door handles, elevator buttons, and common spaces. High-touch surfaces pose a risk for spreading germs, including COVID-19. One option to consider is automation systems that control doors, elevators, and lights. In many cases there are cost-effective alternatives that power doors, elevators, lights, and water fountains, to reduce the risk of germ spread by making these surfaces “touchless”. Another option to consider is implementing video analytics for facility security to assist with one-way traffic monitoring, supporting proper distance between individuals as they enter or exit a facility, as well as monitoring that everyone entering your facility is wearing a mask. Knowing that monitoring is occurring can strengthen compliance with your policies. Additional security options such as touchless temperature screening also help foster a safe environment. Understanding and addressing the concerns of your employees is vital to returning to your workspace.; Contacting an experienced professional engineer to assist you, is a good start to discovering alternative solutions to meet the needs of your space, workforce, business and guests.



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