

EHS Today Webinar

Contractor Safety During and After the Pandemic - A Guide to Business Continuity

Questions answered by Jeff Muto, Veriforce Chief Marketing & Strategy Officer

Q&A Session Recap:

Q) Can you offer your thoughts on automated systems that offer contractor pre-qualification capability relative to this exercise, box-checking versus adding real value from a risk-management perspective?

A) From our perspective, this all comes down to the culture, the mindset, and the objectives of the organization. There are those that want to ensure they're "covered" in the event that an incident occurs, and there's nothing wrong with that. Then there are the companies that are working to transform their supply chains and partner networks by engaging them and ensuring alignment with core operating standards and principles. Modern technology makes prequalification box-checking easier, faster and more complete. There's an argument to be made for leveraging it for that purpose, but companies can achieve that outcome with email, fax machines and filing cabinets. Transforming your risk management practice and working to optimize the performance of your contract workforce, safety or otherwise, absolutely requires modern technology.

Q) How does your Supply Chain/Purchasing departments incorporate contractor safety into the purchasing process?

A) This is a great question, and one we all should be considering in our daily practice. EHS practices, we believe, only achieve optimal impact when they are valued and adhered to enterprise-wide. The first part (valued) requires internal "selling." It's critical that EHS regularly and effectively engages Supply Chain/Procurement and stakeholders within the organization to gain buy-in as to the value of working with vendors that align to your company's EHS standards. The second (adherence) requires doing things to encourage other stakeholders to easily



incorporate EHS standards into their daily practices, and that's where modern technology plays a pivotal role. As an example, rather than making Procurement scour paper records of a contractor to ensure their TRIR is acceptable, we should serve up a real-time view of contractor qualification in the company's procurement system. All of this comes down to providing every stakeholder group with the insights they need to make the next best decision in real-time.

Q) Clients want to know that you have their specific training. How can this be standardized?

A) Training is a very complex topic. As I mentioned in the live session, there are three primary training types in our world: industry-standard training, best-practice training and client-specific training. What makes this complex is that all three often have different modalities and tracking mechanisms. For example, SafeLand training (U.S. energy market) is delivered in-person by certified instructors, and the training records are maintained and shared by an industry-approved group of governing entities. A trusted provider of safety training provides a best-practice course on how to safely work at heights via an e-learning module (SCORM compliant). A hiring client delivers a site-specific, in-person training at the facility on safety protocols, muster points, etc.

Ideally – and I'll plug Veriforce here, humbly – all of these training modalities and sources can be tracked in the same system, attached to the same worker profile, and shared with the relevant parties that require visibility into them. This enables worker training records to travel with them like a digital passport, and each client will see that the worker has met any and all training that the client requires.

Q) We also work with multiple clients and have situations where one client approves an element of our corporate training and another requires modifications to our program before they will approve. How do we deal with this? Obviously we can't continuously modify our corporate programs for each client.

A) This is a challenge that we hear about often and work hard to resolve on the behalf of our contractor customers. Doing so requires EHS domain expertise being applied in a manner that serves both parties. At Veriforce, we work with and advise our clients to codify their risk mitigation principles and practices to ensure alignment with industry best-practices and standards. When this is done, we are clear about and aligned to the objectives. When contractors go through our Safety Program Evaluation process, our safety professionals review policies and programs objectively, qualitatively, and with a view to meeting those standards rather than nuanced preferences.

Q) We work for multiple companies, 15+ different clients, how do we manage safety compliance, and how do we keep up with so many different policies?

A) This is related to the previous question, but with some minor variance. Simply put, Veriforce and companies like ours exist solely to address this challenge for contractors and clients. In the industries we serve, there are myriad multi-dimensional relationships, and gaining visibility into them all (clients) and ensuring compliance with all of the standards/practices (contractors) is



brutally difficult. The benefit of being in the Veriforce Network (or similar) is that contractors have a much easier time understanding the associated client requirements and proving adherence to them. Contractors create their profile once, upload the required documents once, and share it all with any client on the network as needed, with a touch of a button. So, the contractor experience goes from constantly repeating the entire process to periodically making minor adjustments to information in their profile to accommodate a client-specific request. This is all about simplifying things for everyone involved.

Q) How can we perform training with few internal resources considering technological difficulties in some countries in Africa?

A) Training can be tough, as we discussed. In this specific case, with the challenge being limited internal resources, I would recommend leaning heavily on industry bodies and/or large corporate players in the industry. I have no guidance specific to Africa but will reach out to you directly to discuss.

Q) How do you recommend getting skeptical employees to buy in and take this seriously, other than telling them that the things that they do are for others' safety?

A) While there were lots of great questions, this one is a nugget and probably the hardest for me to answer. I'm a believer in making more believers, and that's all about winning the hearts and minds of the people around us. There's no science behind this, but these are my general principles:

1. Tie HSE back to things people care about – family, bottom line, personal responsibility, quality, etc.
2. Make participating simple with systems, processes, etc.
3. Start small and simple; asking for big investment up front is suboptimal.
4. Show real, positive results as soon as possible; people want to feel impact/change early.
5. Work to ensure respectful feedback and accountability.
6. Enable and promote continuous improvement; people like to feel progress.

Q) Can you provide an exposure control plan template for construction?

A) Veriforce has a pandemic and infectious disease policy that can be customized for your specific needs. This plan covers a broad base of infectious diseases, not just COVID-19.



Q) Do you have recommendations for preventing heat stress-related issues due to increased PPE usage?

A) Heat stress-related issues this time of year are of particular concern because the United States is having a summer that is hotter than average, coupled now with a requirement to wear masks for longer periods of time, or for people that typically do not wear any form of respiratory protection. I would recommend that in addition to your normal heat stress prevention techniques of hydration, shade and schedule flexibility that you consider creating a sanitary space with sufficient social distancing where workers can take off their masks for a few minutes of fresh air.

Q) What documentation should be on-hand to present during an audit by a governing body in an instance of a COVID-19 infection?

A) The state of Virginia (VOSH) is currently the only state that has a standard for COVID-19 reporting. If you work in the state of Virginia, you will need to review that standard for any reporting or documentation requirements. Outside of the state of Virginia, federal OSHA has listed guidance along with the CDC for actions employers should take to protect workers. It is recommended that you have a pandemic policy, training for employees, and that you document such training. Additionally, I would recommend that you keep records of your contact tracing within your organization. Should the case be determined to be work-related, your normal OSHA 300 recordability requirements apply and must be available for audit.

Q) With so much conflicting pandemic response information available, how do you decide which resources and/or information sources to use regarding pandemic information?

A) This is an excellent question and has led to much confusion among employers, employees, and the general public. It is recommended that your organization first appoint a pandemic preparedness workplace coordinator who will serve as the link between the directives of the management team and the implementation among the workforce. The workplace coordinator should seek to keep employees up-to-date with the most current information from trusted sources, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). COVID-19 is a novel virus, which means that it is new. It is expected that as the virus evolves and the more that medical science studies the virus, more is learned about how best to protect workers and the public.

Q) What issues should be considered as a result of close-proximity work that includes additional gear, such as wearing goggles, face shields and gloves?

A) Wearing face coverings with additional personal protective equipment such as goggles, face shields and gloves is going to create hygiene issues related to properly disinfecting those items. And in the case of some gloves, disposal issues. It is recommended that you train and implement a system to verify that workers are properly cleaning and disposing of materials that are utilized as PPE. This should be covered in your employee training programs related to COVID-19 and PPE.

Q) Do you have suggestions on how to implement procedures on a construction site where workers are in close proximity?

A) Construction workers are part of the essential workforce, which means working from home is not an option, and keeping six feet distance is impracticable and perhaps even unsafe. In those situations, it is extremely important to have good screening procedures in order to prevent sick or exposed workers from entering the job site. This can be accomplished through effective entry procedures and continued reminders to report exposures. If workers experience symptoms, test



positive, or are exposed to others with COVID-19, they should report this to their immediate supervision, not report to work and self-quarantine. The amount of isolation time should be guided by company policy and the recommendations from competent authorities.

Q) What extra protections might be considered for older, more at-risk workers at construction or other sites?

A) Studies have indicated that older workers and those with underlying health issues may be more susceptible to serious complications related to COVID-19 infection. Where possible, these workers should be limited in contact with other employees. Working from home or from trailers might not be an option, therefore older workers and other at-risk workers must socially distance where practical and wear appropriate PPE. Frequent audits of the job site where more vulnerable employees work is recommended as an added measure to ensure that workers are complying with PPE requirements and not congregating unless it is necessary to perform their job tasks. Lastly, older and more vulnerable workers can be protected through good screening processes to keep the virus out of the workplace. The company must continue to remind and require workers who are symptomatic, test positive, or are exposed to COVID-19 to report that to their supervision and self-isolate for the determined time, then contact tracing can be conducted within the company and effective measures implemented.