10 tips for re-orienting workers as businesses re-open

As workplaces implement COVID-19 guidelines and restrictions, the environment that employees return to may look very different from the one they left. A thorough re-orientation will help employees adjust to the new reality — and instill as much confidence as possible in new policies and procedures. But what should you cover and how should you deliver it? Sandy Ash, WSPS' Manager of OHS Management System Integration, offers 10 tips that can help make your re-orientation a success. But first, a few preparatory steps.

Prepare a re-entry plan

Involve a cross-sectional pandemic response team that includes key internal stakeholders, such operations, safety, human resources, facilities, finance, IT, and the joint health and safety committee (JHSC).

The team's job is to develop policies and procedures around safely returning employees to the workplace. It all starts with a risk assessment to see where and how people may be exposed to COVID-19, then applying the hierarchy of controls to find solutions:

- **Elimination** — reconfiguring how work is done to eliminate the need for face-to-face contact, allowing workers to continuing working from home, conducting virtual meetings, etc.

- **Engineering** — installing barriers and partitions, increasing ventilation, re-arranging work stations, limiting access to the facility, etc.

- **Administrative** — conducting health screening, phasing entry, increasing the frequency of cleaning and decontamination, posting signage on preventive measures, etc.

- **Personal protective equipment (PPE)** — providing appropriate gloves, facemasks or shields, respirators, etc.

Disseminate new policies and procedures developed by the team as they are ready, says Sandy. "Communicate, communicate, communicate every step along the way. Give employees every opportunity to provide input. Anticipate questions, great feedback and revisions."

Once you've established and shared your plan in advance of opening day, it's time for re-orientation training. "This will help reduce confusion on the first day back," says Sandy.

Given physical distancing requirements, aim to provide training beforehand. "It doesn't make sense to bring everyone back, have them stand outside the door in a big herd, and say, 'Here's what we're going to do.'"

Instead, provide virtual training in advance using your workplace's preferred systems. "Make sure your employees are fully familiar with how to use it. If it has to be done by telephone, then do it by telephone."

As for the content of your orientation training, here are 10 suggestions:

1. a refresher on existing hazards and preventive measures, such as machine guarding, lock-out/tagout, MSDs, machine hazards, etc.
2. how the new rules were developed, i.e. best practices provided by medical authorities and other sources, including your cross-sectional pandemic response team
3. a review of COVID-19 essentials, including possible transmission points in the workplace, and what steps are being taken to protect employees
4. self-screening and workplace screening practices
5. how to enter and exit the workplace
6. how workers can protect themselves (e.g. maintain physical distancing, frequent hand washing or sanitizing, not touching their face, wearing PPE if required)
7. how to keep their work surfaces, keyboards, cash registers, tools and equipment clean, including shared items
8. steps in place to limit the number of people in the workplace at one time
9. how meetings and breaks will be handled
10. what procedures are in place if an employee contracts COVID-19