

Distancing Design

Re-entering the Built Environment, Post COVID-19

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Interaction is a key catalyst for innovation.

The physical office and classroom space will continue to facilitate interaction and collaboration and, ultimately, personal health, wellbeing and productivity. But it will look different. Flexibility will be critical to accommodate rapid change in these built environments. For some institutions, the Learn/Work from Home (L/WFH) policy will continue. But touch down points catering to face-to-face or large group meetings promoting connections and collaboration will be still needed. Social connections will remain an important necessity. Beyond indoor spaces, out-door amenities may rise in significance without daily trips to an office or classroom and the social interaction that experience brings.

Bringing offices, universities, military and health institutions back “on-line” could be vulnerable to the secondary waves of contagion. Those with dining, living or other spaces that cater to large groups must be re-evaluated and ensure adequate social distancing so they can safely function. Some other changes might eliminate “Touch-Factors”- new automation and voice technology such as Amazon’s Alexa for automatic doors, lights and elevator usage. New space plans mandating social distancing for open offices and common areas will be needed including applying “every other” desk occupancies.

Adding sanitation stations in common spaces and documentation of the more frequent cleaning schedules will be required. Staggered workforce and class schedules, limiting the number of people in a space at a certain time, capacity signage and fewer chairs in meeting rooms or classrooms are quick and easy fixes.

We will go back to work and the classroom plus resume participation in social gatherings such as restaurants and theaters. But when we do, it will not be business as usual. **The office and class-rooms will look different, function different and be utilized different.** The focus on health, safety, density, security and location will have entirely new meanings and high-quality property and facilities management will be more important than ever.



A crucial element in returning to the office or classroom is to understand the occupants needs and maintaining communication. Significant collaboration will be needed between building owners, administration, tenants, employees, and governments to address the challenges that lie ahead.

Murray Associates Architects, P. C. suggest utilizing our Distancing Design Best Practices which we call the “Three R’s to Re-entry the built environment”. They are as follows:

- 1. Review**
- 2. Recommend**
- 3. Retrofit**

Review / Analyze the current spatial conditions

Analysis considers safety and any other opportunities for functionality plus full assessment of all building systems, including air and water quality issues, in buildings that have been vacant. HVAC systems should produce healthy indoor environments where pathogens are filtered, diluted, and removed from the occupant breathing zone.

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Planned Spacing of workstations with additional clear plexiglass shields. Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA)



Biophilic Design utilizing a living wall, Bloomsburg University

Recommendations for Re-entry

Processes, protocols, clear workable agreements and rules of conduct must put the safety of everyone first. Clear communication and education will ensure a smooth “re-entry” with new guidelines and expectations. We suggest designating a small core team for all company/institution communications to maintain a consistent message for a smooth journey back to today’s “new normal”. Facility managers may want to refer to IFMA (International Facility Management Association) guidelines and protocols for further information.

Workplace layouts and employee densities must be carefully considered to address some forms of social distancing, whether by mandate or preference. Estimating usage, monitoring density and flow, and creating flexibility to adjust protocols will be critical for reentry. New work-flow diagrams will allow people to walk safely through spaces avoiding congestion points.

For example, single way directional flows should be implemented such as one stair-case for up-traffic: a different

one for down. These specific plans and new way-finding should be visually displayed for all inhabitants to utilize properly. Depending on the size of an organization, scheduled lunch or dining shifts can alleviate clustering around kitchens, microwaves and dishwashers.

Retrofit / Re-imagining the Built Environment

While social distancing may seem, hopefully, a temporary action, an eye toward open spaces, enabling and encouraging people to spread out, may be a better option. While physical barriers will be used in the short term, a more long-term architectural solution can be developed with space planning.

Common areas must ensure adequate space for social distancing from each occupant. New furniture may be needed that has antimicrobial fabrics or materials and adapting work stations for all employees to work safely will be required. In addition to these general retrofits, other new building upgrades may be required such as negative air-pressure systems to prevent the spread of future infections.

Building occupants can stay healthy by installing Temperature Check Stations. Hand washing must be approached as both an infrastructure and a behavioral issue. Water temperature, vigilant refilling of soap dispensers, touch-less hand dryers and dynamic signage should be mandatory in bathrooms.

Implementation of biophilic design principles, which connects occupants to nature, is proven to have an immediate, positive impact on mental health. A living green/plant wall or a nature-based wall covering are two examples of ways to positively improve the human experience in the built environment.

What we do over the next 6-12 months can ensure that our communities get up and running again while protecting against similar scenarios in the future.

We hope that some of these ideas will assist your organization as it transitions into this Post COVID-19 Era.

For more information, please contact Donna Dubbs, Business Development Manager at ddubbs@murrayassoc.com.