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The Impact of Covid-19 on OHS

Declared as a pandemic by World Health Organization (WHO) on 11th March 2020, Covid-19 has had a wide impact on the world in a short time and workplace occupational health and safety has not been an exception. The Covid-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for countless aspects of society. Many corners of our world and our economy were unprepared and left scrambling to respond. As collective response to the pandemic has evolved, the workplace has become a key testing ground for creating safe and effective protocols to protect workers on the job and society at large.

Organisations with stronger foundations in workplace health and safety were better prepared in some respect. That groundwork in keeping workers safe on the job has been invaluable as companies have worked to build a new normal that incorporates Covid-19 precautions into sustained workplace health and safety program thus even the organisations with the most advanced safety cultures and policies have been re-evaluating how best to protect their entire workforce. Many employers whose operations led them to focus more on injury have been placing stronger emphasis on implementing workplace illness prevention and protection programs.

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On a positive note, the emergency of Covid-19 has made organisation to be more resilient in all their OHS Management Systems. Employers stepped up in a big way, committing to learning and dedicating significant resources to protecting efforts in the wake of Covid-19. Almost overnight, SHE professionals, HR professionals, manager, executives and other company leaders found themselves working to become experts in infectious disease control management. It was not a fair or ideal situation, but for many companies, in particular those deemed essential it was a necessary first step toward building a robust and effective Covid-19 response.

As workplaces have been forced to cut down their expenditure and recheck their workforce to maintain social distancing, downsizing and alternative methods of working from home has been implemented. However, this has had some implications on the mental health of workers with job insecurity and financial worries cited as the primary causes for concern. Since the pandemic emerged, its impact on the mental health of workers has not been as closely examined as the risks to physical health. However, this challenge has been resolved by the development of the ISO 45003 which is a driving force for managing psychosocial health at the workplace.



Furthermore, the method of working remotely to decongest the workplace has brought about a number of implications on OHS since managing people who are out of the workplace presents a set of challenges as it is difficult for the employer to have control over the home environment from which the employee is working. For instance, a scenario where someone connects their laptop at home and then there's over current that comes through and the laptop gets damaged now broadening that if an incident occurs at home and someone calls in and reports that is that considered a workplace um safety incident been applied by the employers? However, this challenge was solved by the development of the ISO 45005 which aims at providing the guidelines for working safely during the Covid-19 pandemic in sync with the ISO 45001:2018.

Reduced number of workers on site resulted in fewer workers doing the same amount of work to meet targets for business sustainability, thus workload has been increased on available workers. The strained workforce has been exposed to increased safety risk. Under these circumstances, the responsibility of management has been to keep balance between production, profit and safety at workplace as well as to keep employees well motivated and free from the stressful environment due to the pandemic.

The pandemic has created an exceptional set of circumstances; most companies have realized business losses as they failed to meet targets due to slowdowns of industrial activities. As government restrictions are easing economic recession is approaching. With the resumption of full operations, targets have to be met, money has to be made to make up for the lost hours, this has a possibility of translating into safety being overlook over production resulting in the increase of workplace incidents. Thus the end of the containment measures is at the same time a challenge and an opportunity for those in the field of OHS, either at a policy level or in the field, to translate their valuable insights on the complex relationship between work and health into workable action so as to reduce the toll of an approaching recession.

In conclusion, even though Covid-19 has presented a number of challenges with all the risks associated with it, fundamentally the response taken by many companies changed the way many perceive safety. Prior to Covid-19 operational barriers to work practices were ubiquitous but when companies saw that they had to drive herculean efforts to get or keep their business open, the paradigm shifted. Today many if not all business operators understand they can and must do anything to provide a safe workplace for their employees.

