

## REIMAGINE, REALIGN, RECONNECT: TIME TO CREATE HEALTHY BUILDINGS

We shouldn't be too hasty to draw conclusions about what the enduring effects of the crisis are likely to be. But it seems fairly safe to suggest that the relationship of employees to their workplaces will be forever changed. Moving forward, many more people are likely to be home-based and those who do work from the office take a healthy and safe environment for granted.

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When they are in the workplace, people also bound to be more attuned to whether their working environment is conducive to good health. Facilities managers will certainly have their part to play in achieving compliance with guidelines issued by governments across Europe. This typically encompasses everything from the observance of physical distancing rules and the configuration of chairs and screens, to water quality and the effective management of visitors and contractors.

These are all considerations that should fall under the remit of any decent risk assessment. However, the core systems that keep buildings operating effectively must also not be overlooked. In particular, FM's will want to think carefully about the maintenance of ventilation and a healthy and continually renewed air supply – moving the focus firmly away from the previous emphasis on recirculating air, towards increase air supply and exhaust ventilation.

***“Ensuring that core building systems – including those managing air supply and climate – are fit for purpose in an ever-changing world should be top priority as employees return to the workplace”, says Priva Building Automation’s VP strategy and commerce, Peter Vandendriessche.***

For example, the REHVA COVID-19 guidance document (1) published earlier this year urges employers to “secure ventilation of spaces with outdoor air, switch the ventilation to nominal speed at least two hours before the building usage time and not switch off ventilation during nights and weekends.” The same sort of guidance will be issued all over the world.

This focus on air quality is sure to be part of an overall heightened awareness of buildings' climatic conditions, including temperature, humidity and lighting. A decisive trend towards integrated building and climate control systems has commenced for some time, but is bound to accelerate now that the need to monitor and optimise the health-inducing characteristics of the workplace has become more acute. We encourage FM's to ensure that they have the systems in place to support the health and safety of employees during these exceptional times, as well as enabling the more eternal concerns of greater productivity and lower operational costs.

Across Europe there is now a regulatory impulse to ensure that buildings are ready for reoccupation and will not contribute to the risk of a further spike in Coronavirus cases. But as Nick Wilson remarks in his recent article for People Management (2), effective action in this regard can also make a crucial difference to the confidence of employees as they return to the workplace.

With inspections on the cards and employees invited to report any concerns to the relevant regulators, “it is vital to ensure that your workplace is compliant,” writes Wilson. “But it's not all about avoiding enforcement action; by demonstrating to employees that you are taking their safety seriously, you can help to allay concerns and minimise the risk of refusals to work, making for a much smoother transition to the 'new norm', reaffirming your position as a responsible employer, and ultimately saving lives.”

Sources:

(1) [www.rehva.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/REHVA\\_COVID-19\\_guidance\\_document\\_ver2\\_20200403\\_1.pdf](http://www.rehva.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/REHVA_COVID-19_guidance_document_ver2_20200403_1.pdf)

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