

BARRY COMMONER CENTER for Health & the Environment

The Barry Commoner Center for Health and the Environment at Queens College of the City University of New York endorses the following COVID-19 practices in relation to occupational health and safety:

WORKFORCE BEST PRACTICES FOR COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an urgent need for companies to adopt best practices to protect their workers, their customers and the communities they serve. We encourage companies to adopt the following recommended policies and practices that were developed in consultation with occupational and public health experts:

- **Only Essential Goods and Services** To protect public safety, businesses should restrict activity to the provision of essential goods and services, such as food, medicine, household cleaning, auto fuel, and personal hygiene.
- **Independent Expertise** Employers should consult independent certified industrial hygienists, occupational physicians, and public health experts to advise them on how these best practices for the prevention of infection should be incorporated into each specific operating environment.
- **Workplace COVID-19 Prevention and Control Plan** Employers should develop, with participation of impacted employees, a written infectious disease prevention and control plan (the Plan) with a hierarchy of controls, including specific requirements for hazard assessment, engineering controls such as high-efficiency air-filters and clear plastic “sneeze” barriers, administrative controls such as adjusting work schedules, regular sanitization, and providing regular paid breaks for employees to wash their hands and clean their workstations, adequate personal protective equipment, and employee training in all safety and health controls. This written plan should be made readily available to employees upon request.
- **Personal Protective Equipment** After instituting engineering and administrative controls, employers should provide the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) for their work setting, including respiratory protection (e.g. N95 disposable respirators), gloves, work clothing, and eye protection, as recommended by occupational safety and health experts. Given uncertainty regarding risks of COVID-19 infection, employers should err toward greater protection in selection of PPE.
- **Sanitization** Employers should regularly sanitize workplaces, locker rooms, rest rooms, and break rooms. When an employee is infected employers should immediately close, ventilate, clean, and disinfect all areas or facilities where the infected individual worked for as long as defined in the Plan.
- **Identification, Contact Tracing, and Isolation** Where workers are infected or symptomatic, employers should provide two weeks of paid time off, promptly inform other employees who have been in contact, offer free testing for the virus to infected/symptomatic and contacted workers, allot contacts paid time off to self-isolate, and inform public health authorities.
- **Social Distancing** Employers should separate workstations to allow for physical distancing of at least six feet, unless additional engineering and administrative controls are implemented and more protective PPE is provided. Employers should adopt social distancing best practices

and procedures, including mask requirements to enter work areas, staggered shifts, telework, and limiting contact with customers. Pregnant and immunocompromised workers should be offered alternative work arrangements to accommodate their underlying health conditions.

- **Productivity Targets** Employers should relax productivity quotas for workers and suspend production-related disciplinary write-ups to allow time for proper physical distancing, sanitization, and personal hygiene practices.
- **Paid Leave** Employers should provide paid sick leave to encourage sick workers to stay home, paid leave for quarantined workers, paid leave at any temporarily closed facilities, and family leave options to provide for childcare due to school closings or to care for elderly or sick family members. Paid sick leave should not be contingent on COVID-19 testing results.
- **Health Insurance** In countries without universal health systems, employers should provide affordable health insurance to all employees and offer employer-paid health insurance for employees laid off during the pandemic. This insurance should cover COVID-19 testing and care.
- **Contingent Workers** Employers should ensure that part-time workers, temporary workers, independent contractors, and subcontracted workers receive all the protections and benefits provided to full-time company employees, including those outlined above.
- **Supply Chains** Timely and prompt payments to suppliers will help retain suppliers' workforces and ensure that a stable supply chain is in place for business operations going forward. Companies should encourage and support their suppliers to adopt these best practices for protecting their workforces from COVID-19.
- **Workers' Rights** Employers must not retaliate against workers who raise concerns or take collective action to address workplace health and safety concerns or the terms and conditions of their employment. Employers must not discriminate against workers who report illness. Employers should engage in dialogue with trade unions and workers and their representatives to implement and monitor workplace health and safety procedures.

These recommendations aim to ensure that companies reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission to their workforces, customers, and the communities they serve. By adopting these best practices, companies can help mitigate the public health crisis, build employee and customer goodwill, and position themselves for success during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

This document has been reviewed and approved by the following experts:

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This document was written and endorsed by the Committee on Workers Capital, an international labor union network.