

COVID-19 Virtual Town Hall: Mental Health and Sanitation of COVID-19 Facilities

May 19, 2020 | Session Overview

PANEL

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MODERATOR

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COVID-19 VIRTUAL TOWN HALL: MENTAL HEALTH AND SANITATION OVERVIEW

On May 19, 2020, the National Institute of Building Sciences held its second in a series of COVID-19 virtual town halls, brought to you by the NIBS Consultative Council. The town hall received more than 800 registrants from throughout the building industry, universities, officials representing the federal, local, and state governments and more.

As we learned in our first town hall on May 7, 2020, bringing the country back to work will take planning, vision, and expertise – all of it based on science and data. During that town hall, we learned about COVID-19 transfer and mitigation, how to manage transportation and returning to a commute, and steps needed to prepare the workplace, including HVAC and water systems.

For this second town hall, NIBS President & CEO Lakisha A. Woods gave an overview of the mission of the organization and introduced the moderator and panelists.

When it comes to mental health and sanitation, our subject matter experts pointed to the critical role that communication plays in moving toward reopening businesses, offices, and communities.

The next town hall is scheduled for June. Details will be shared on www.nibs.org.

Site references:

- NIBS COVID-19 Virtual Town Hall: Preparing for Reentering Buildings: <https://nibs.org/page/covid-19-virtual-town-hall>

CONVERTING FACILITIES INTO TEMPORARY COVID-19 CARE SPACES

The pandemic required many communities to come up with temporary facilities to care for COVID-19 patients and medical personnel. Alternate care and treatment were created in a number of spaces, including convention centers and formerly closed hospitals. Hotels also were used to create alternate sites for patients.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers developed its strategy early on, when New York Governor Andrew Cuomo said he needed USACE help. The organization mobilized, met with the governor's team, and on the flight back began to draft and roll out a greater strategy that would help others in need. The strategy involved four phases, with involvement by state and local authorities: planning, building, supply, and staffing of facilities.

Site selection and assessment of temporary spaces took place first. Then, spaces were converted to healthcare use. Some of the factors that weighed in to site selection included air handling capacities, air filtration, egress out of the facilities, staging

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of ambulances around the structure, and close proximity to area hospitals. The intent was to execute these healthcare conversions to operate for a period of five days to two weeks, and the aim was to have these spaces ready before a critical need was witnessed in that area or jurisdiction.

By Day 67 (May 19, 2020) of the pandemic, USACE received 64 mission assignments from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. This amounted to just under \$2 billion worth of effort, with 2,000 USACE workers deployed across the enterprise. USACE completed 1,148 site assessments for state and local authorities and awarded 37 alternative care conversion contracts across 17 states, one territory, one tribal nation, and Washington, D.C.

Total bed spaces for patients: 15,000. Most of the facilities stand ready to meet the need and USACE is preparing for what may be on the horizon. As much as is possible, USACE is preparing for additional responses should COVID-19 resurface.

Site references:

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers COVID-19 Response Efforts: <https://www.usace.army.mil/Coronavirus/>
- USACE Contractor Response to COVID-19: <https://www.usace.army.mil/Business-With-Us/Contracting/>

BRINGING HOTEL ROOMS BACK ONLINE

The entire hospitality and travel industry has been affected by the pandemic. And like every hotel company and independent hotelier in the world, Marriott Hotels has been impacted.

Part of plan to bring Marriott Hotels' properties back online is a multi-pronged platform, elevating its global cleanliness standard. This effort is being overseen by the Marriott Global Cleanliness Council, which maintains a number of experts and scientists, including epidemiology, and hygiene and technology experts.

The ultimate goal is to keep employees and guests safe.

The aim is to identify and deploy scientifically-supported practices. This includes an intensive deep clean after every guest stay, and more frequent cleanings and disinfection of

high-touch areas, elevator buttons, escalator handrails, and public spaces, especially during peak usage.

Other things on the table for consideration include the removal of nonessential items, such as throw pillows. Food stations and breakfast buffets may, in the short term, include more pre-packaged items. In hotels where there are food stations, a hotel staffer may dole out servings to lessen the amount of contact with items like serving spoons, etc.

Site reference:

- Marriott Hotels: <https://marriott-hotels.marriott.com/>
- Marriott COVID-19 update and extended cancellation policy: <https://marriott-re-2019ncovc.com/>

RETURNING CONVENTION SPACE TO MEETINGS AND EVENTS

The Baltimore Convention Center serves as an agency of the City of Baltimore, driving economic stimulus to the city with its roughly 140 annual meetings, conventions, and events. It generates \$40 million to \$60 million in residual tax revenue.

In March 2020, the 1.2-million-square-foot convention center was contracted to become a medical station for 250 beds, serving COVID-19 convalescents.

The center has been able to isolate its building to serve this purpose, with separate systems for everything – air handlers, trash facilities, loading docks, and staff entrances for the upward of 1,500 employees who staff this effort from the University of Maryland medical system and Johns Hopkins University. The rest of the facility is used as a food distribution center.

Going forward, convention officials and senior staff are combing through a new meetings and convention footprint, including front of the house standards, food and beverage, and event technologies to support meeting attrition or supplement social distancing.

Organizations like the International Association of Venue Managers is helping to lead the effort with clean building standards and best practices.

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The Baltimore Convention Center is working with existing clients to ensure all meetings and annual events go off without a hitch. The center also is putting together videos to help explain to employees what has been happening to the space. This has become an important communication method to reinforce to convention center staff of what's being done to keep everyone safe.

Site references:

- International Association of Venue Managers COVID-19 Outbreak Resources: <https://www.iavm.org/covid-19-outbreak-resources>
- Baltimore Convention Center Coronavirus (COVID-19) Prevention Measures Update: <https://www.bccenter.org/p/about/novel-coronavirus-baltimore-convention-center-statement>

ON SANITATION: AN EFFECTIVE CLEANING AND DISINFECTION PROGRAM

Proper cleaning and disinfection is key to bringing people back into our facilities.

Whereas in healthcare this was a primary focus, the world now is catching up: We see the need for cleaning and disinfection in all different types of facilities and spaces.

A comprehensive sanitation procedure is very important. Not only will this need to be in place for initial occupancy, but a comprehensive program will be necessary going forward to ensure infection prevention.

As much as cleaning frequencies and focus on high-touch surface areas will be critical, so will staff training, which will ensure everyone as well as the work environment remains protected.

Selection of tools, supplies and equipment are equally important. There is a list of 410 chemicals that are approved to clean and disinfect. But it's not just about choosing the right chemical, but also the right process. Read the label – dwell time, or recognizing the contact time that the chemical needs to sit on the surface, is a necessary consideration when cleaning and disinfecting.

Finally, communication and validation are other necessary

steps, creating assurance for building occupants. There are a number of industry and government resources. These provide a reference for industry standards. You must articulate and show what you're doing to protect people.

Site references:

- CleanHealth Environmental Online Coronavirus Risk Mitigation Trainings: <https://www.cleanhealthenv.com/health/services/coronavirus-risk-mitigation-services/>
- CleanHealth Environmental Healthcare and Infection Prevention Services: <https://www.cleanhealthenv.com/health/>

MENTAL HEALTH AND DEALING WITH THE MANY LAYERS OF ANXIETY

From a behavioral standpoint, if your employees or workers don't feel safe, they're not going to perform their functions.

To psychologically prepare your staff, pay as much attention to your employees as you are with preparing your building or space.

Some employees may want to return; others may be fearful with coming back to the building. There's no one message that will cover everyone.

It's important to build credibility and trust.

Communicate with your employees and provide ample notice of plans. Make sure they know you have their best interests at heart, that you're following the science and keeping their health and safety chiefly in mind.

Giving as much certainty as possible will go a long way in helping to reduce anxiety. Control also is important – the more choices that you give people, the better. Small choices like where or how they sit in the office may not seem like a big deal, but it will give your employee a greater sense of control.

Social distancing may be around for the foreseeable future, but be on the look out for social disconnection. Particularly for employees who are working from home, social disconnection is bad.

Employers and leaders must be creative – whether it's weekly or biweekly town halls, virtual chatrooms, online classes or

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interest groups – to keep employees and staff connected. Finally, think about things in terms of the long haul. As the pandemic changes, you'll need to pay attention to what's happening.

Site references:

- American Psychological Association COVID-19 Information and Resources: <https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/>
- APA Supporting Employee Mental Health When Reopening the Workplace: <https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/employee-mental-health>
- APA Psychological Impact of COVID-19: <https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/psychological-impact>
- APA Tips for Quarantined Parents in the Times of COVID-19: <https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/quarantine-parents-tips>