

COVID 19 LESSONS LEARNED

Lessons learned summary:

The COVID-19 Pandemic has brought new challenges to the management of the Department of Energy (DOE) missions and operations. This team was tasked with specifically evaluating opportunities to relieve stress/anxiety in the workplace with HPI/physiology - to reduce errors.

This lesson learned was developed through a collaborative effort between several members of the EFCOG Human Performance Improvement Task Group.

Employees across the Department Of Energy (and the Department of Homeland Security - NBACC) complex have been personally impacted by COVID-19; whether it be personally or professionally. Each corporate member of EFCOG has met this challenge head on. All members have provided multiple avenues of support to their employees. This support may come in the form of employment, health and safety, emotional and psychological support, support for family members, procedures and protocols, web page enhancements, etc. COVID-19 has also had an impact on the way we work. This lesson learned highlights some of the most important elements EFCOG members should include in their strategies to reduce errors due to stress, anxiety, changes in work controls, and changes to how work is done.

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Brief description of the lesson learned:

1. This is an unpredictable and uncontrollable situation.
 - a. Leaders and employees need to recognize what they can control and what they cannot control (circle of control, circle of influence, out of our control).
 - b. Recognize that there is uncertainty on how long this will last; especially if we have not been given a date to return to work. This can be compounded by the impact of isolation and that our former lines of communications have been interrupted. We are pretty good (or bad) at imagining the worst possible outcomes when our futures are uncertain.
 - c. Societal behaviors could influence facility behaviors and impact achieving crucial mission objectives.
 - d. Keep adapting. For example, previous cultural “expectations” to come to work when feeling under the weather need to be changed.

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- e. Be human - we're vulnerable, but it's also an opportunity. Be curious and create - innovate and collaborate - have courageous conversations.
 - f. Be agile. Organizations should have diverse expertise and extremely high-quality discussions, made in an environment that is oriented toward learning and problem solving.
2. Organizations must consider the sustained psychological impact of COVID-19 on their employees both at work and away from work.
- a. Recognizing symptoms of stress as well as building resilience are crucial. They must recognize that everyone is having a different response, and that is okay and even "normal." Finding someone to talk to about stress and feelings can be a powerful tool to recognize that any feeling is "normal."
 - b. Stress is caused by a lack of control and creates a tense environment. The reality of 2020 is that it is stressful. Stress can become all-consuming. Thinking, talking about and experiencing things outside of our control is stressful. Stress is debilitating, it strips us of the ability to make good decisions. Just as experiencing things outside of our control is stressful conversely, experiencing things within our control is empowering. We want to regain control, but may not know how to do this. Organizations must provide employee's avenues to coping skills if stressed; help people normalize the new situation.
 - c. The most direct way to combat anxiety is to provide clear information & guidance. Reducing uncertainty restores confidence and alleviates stress. Organizations need to provide communications and updates daily. Keep *over*-communicating.
 - d. It is important for leaders to create a psychologically safe environment when employees/friends/acquaintances test positive for, or have close contact with a COVID infected person. It can be difficult for those affected to come forward, i.e. feeling judged for not following the "rules". It is especially important for Management to take a thoughtful and proactive approach to news of a positive test or close contact. They must work diligently, but respectfully to proactively get ahead of any potential negative impacts to the employee or work environment, and to ensure the employee that they did the right thing.
3. Organizations must consider the impact of additional Personal Protective Equipment, social distancing, and other COVID-19 protocols on the ability to safely and effectively conduct work.
- a. For example, previously, people would commute to remote locations in a bus (NNSS, daily commuting to work, etc.). Now with social distancing impact, we are traveling to remote locations in cars (increased traffic – different hazards than busses). Traffic went from few (busses) to many (cars).
 - b. Communicating while wearing a mask is difficult. Sound may be muffled. You cannot "read lips." Facial expressions (smiles,

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- frowns) are obscured. People must enunciate and project their voice. Secondary impacts, such as fogged glasses, may impact worker safety.
- c. Wearing a mask may induce stress responses; both for the wearer and for those on the other side of the mask. Help people understand and accept the reasons for wearing masks (not just compliance). If necessary, seek options that may be less stressful. Coping mechanisms include gum or mints to calm the nerves; or wearing “fun” masks. Be mindful of a domino effect if one worker removes their mask. Some may follow the practice, yet others could have increased stress.
4. Organizations must consider the health (physical and emotional) of their employees.
 - a. Employees deemed “crucial” or “essential” are concerned that their “lives” are being put at risk and not treated fairly (equally) compared to those who do get to quarantine. They feel management is at home (safe) and we are here (exposed to COVID). Organizations should clearly define “crucial” and/or “essential” employees and converse with those who meet this definition.
 - b. Employees need “opportunities to be heard.” “Being included” is the first step to establish psychological safety for employees. Leaders must create a safe environment to have candid conversations. Leaders need to “listen;” It’s not about “telling them.” Leaders may have to learn to “listen remotely.” When employees are heard they feel cared for; it reduces the chaos. Some employees may just need to share their experiences.
 - c. Purposeful efforts to *stay in touch* are necessary. Periodically “check-in” to see if remote working employees are well. Virtual coffee breaks, lunches, and social time are socialization methods to cope with separation anxiety or the feeling of being “left out.”
 - d. We can build resilience during this time by focusing on good coping skills (setting a schedule, getting enough sleep and practicing good sleep, good hygiene, good exercise and diet/nutrition routines, anxiety reducing techniques including relaxation practice, self-care, therapy)
 5. Home, the new office, is now different.
 - a. Employees need flexibility to manage work and home (schooling) needs. Children, spouses, pets are now at the work site (home).
 - b. Ergonomics – working from a laptop in the kitchen is not the same as ergonomic furniture at work. Organizations need to be creative in meeting ergonomic needs with everyday household items, such as using books to elevate a computer monitor or a rolled towel as a back support. Get up and stretch; get some fresh air.
 - c. Social isolation – some people are living alone and lost the social interaction with co-workers. Incidental conversations are missed (opportunities in the hallway are gone, now you need to put forth effort to have those casual conversations)

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- d. Virtual observations and collaboration – are there opportunities to use Go-Pro cameras to remotely observe, do peer checks, etc. Software platforms need to support new “virtual dynamic conversations/collaborations. Organizations need to consider infrastructure and security protocols to accomplish this new need. Organizations may need to consider obtaining approved USB cameras and USB microphones (headsets) that help us move from in-person face-to-face interactions and enable the conduct of DOE approved virtual interactions.

Why the Lesson learned was used:

This team was tasked with specifically evaluating opportunities to relieve stress/anxiety in the workplace with HPI/physiology - to reduce errors. It should be used to provide a list of topics that organizations should consider as part of their COVID-19 strategy.

These concepts discussed above may be used in any of the ISMS Core Functions.

- Define the Scope of Work
 - What are the complete requirements (wearing a mask part-time, wearing a mask all time, etc.) for the task
 - What is the worst thing that could happen due to COVID protocols?
 - Consider unpredictable elements (how long will COVID last?)
 - Define “essential”
 - Where will the task occur? At the facility or remote?
- Analyze Hazards
 - Be mindful and investigate rumors and conflicting scientific data.
 - Be prepared for changing protocols as we learn more about COVID.
 - Plan for positive testing waiting periods and positive test results
 - Scheduling time to get tested for COVID
 - Possible impacts of “group” testing (positive by association)
 - Risk fatigue (got to get out of the house, tired of wearing a mask)
 - “Home” risks, hazards, etc.

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- Develop/Implement Hazard Controls
 - Set up a clearing house or team to investigate rumors, update information, adjust for changing CDC guidance,
 - COVID websites - keep links and form active and accurate
 - Use accepted ALARA principles (Time - Distance - Shielding) for COVID controls (minimize time with others - social distancing - wear a mask, use barriers)
 - Employee support networks, resources, and documents/presentations
 - Controls for “home” risks, hazards, etc.
 - Do not make decisions alone. COVID-19 organizational decisions require diverse expertise and an extremely high-quality discussion process.
- Perform Work
 - COVID practices implemented and reinforced; manage drift away from expectations
 - Communication between workers at the facility (or working remotely) with management
 - New ways to use technology - telecommuting, tele-observations, etc.
- Feedback/Improvement
 - Each day has a way of communicating, check-in on successes, people can feel like they are accomplishing things; it adds to morale. How do we accomplish “safety” today?
 - Compliments and concerns meetings

The recognition of error likely situations (error precursors) and the use of Human Performance Improvement practices and tools may be used to mitigate the impacts from COVID-19.

- Distractions:
 - A distraction could be anything that takes your mind off the task that is being done. Distractions can be mental or physical in nature. They can occur where the work is being performed or they can occur in the psyche of the person performing the work. Regardless of their nature, numerous distractions may occur during the course of one’s work. It is important that each of us recognize when our attention is being diverted and take steps to assure that our work continues correctly.
- Mitigating the risk
 - Increase attention by pausing and practicing STAR: Stop - Think - Act - Review
 - Once returning to your work, go back through all the steps to ensure where you left off (Questioning Attitude, Job site review)
 - Use detailed checklists

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- Stress:
 - Stress is the subconscious response to the demands placed on a person. Everyone handles stress differently and particular situations can bring about different degrees of difficulty for different people.
- Mitigating the risk
 - Take time off or a short break if you are feeling stressed
 - Discuss with a co-worker or supervisor and ask them to monitor your work (task preview, peer check, concurrent verification, independent verification, peer review, and conservative decision making)
- Fatigue:
 - Fatigue can be mental or physical in nature. Emotional fatigue also exists and affects mental and physical performance. A person is said to be fatigued when a reduction or impairment in any of the following occurs: cognitive ability, decision-making, reaction time, coordination, speed, strength and balance. Fatigue reduces alertness and often reduces a person's ability to focus and hold attention on the task being performed.
- Mitigating the risk
 - Be aware of the symptoms and look for them in yourself and others (situational awareness)
 - Cancel/delay complex tasks if you know you are exhausted (Pause when unsure)

What are the benefits of the lessons learned:

Through sharing and collaboration multiple Human Performance related presentations and checklists were developed by EFCOG members. These include *Return to Work* training, job observation modifications, pre and post job review checklists, etc. that take into consideration COVID-19 impacts and protocols.

What problems/issues were associated with the lessons learned:

COVID-19 is an ever evolving issue; be aware of the variables and that they can be perceived differently between teams/crews. Organizations must be flexible and attuned to changing recommendations from the Centers for Disease Controls (CDC), as well as Federal, State, and Local governments. Organizations need to seek out Best Practices, yet realizing these may change as we learn more.

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How the success of the lessons learned was measured:

Several measures may be used to measure effectiveness. These include employee surveys (find out their needs in COVID-19), traditional metrics (recordable injuries, events, etc.), and periodic conversations with employees. Ultimately the true measure is accomplishing the [critical] mission without consequential impacts to quality, safety, goals and objectives.

Description of process experience using the lessons learned:

1. The EFCOG HPI Task Group conducts monthly conference calls where collaboration and sharing across the complex has resulted in new ideas, shared insights, and peer reviews of proposed presentations and communications.
2. Argonne National Laboratories has found benefits to including COVID-19 protocols in their pre job briefings as well as their post job reviews.
3. LANL (and other DOE facilities) has created a COVID-19 HUB on its internal homepage (LANL INSIDE) where employees may easily find links to resources for on-site work, telework, FAQ's, travel guidelines, etc. It also has contacts for employee wellness such as at-home ergonomics, employee assistance, and other useful links.
4. SLAC (and other DOE facilities) has created HPI themed communications for its employees. An example communication included topics such as distractions (mind on something other than the task), fatigue, and stress. Each topic included human performance concepts that could be used under each situation.

Additional resources used to develop this Lesson Learned:

- Websites (with COVID-19 guidance and/or hyperlinks):
 - Department of Energy, COVID-19 HUB <https://www.energy.gov/covid-19-hub>
 - Department of Energy, COVID-19 Energy Sector Response Efforts and FAQ's <https://www.energy.gov/ceser/articles/covid-19-energy-sector-response-efforts-and-frequently-asked-questions>
 - United States Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), COVID-19 (<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/>)
 - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Coronavirus (COVID-19) (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>)

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- Articles, videos, and publications:
 - [What to Do and Say to Support Psychological Safety During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#), Institute for Healthcare Improvement, April 10, 2020,
 - [COVID-19: Team and Human Factors to Improve Safety](#), Patient Safety network, July 2020
 - [Coping with COVID-19: An Employer's Guide to Workplace Stress from HRpreneur in Podcasts](#), Apple Podcasts
 - [COVID-19: Considering the impacts of human factors on business integrity](#), Environmental Resources Management (ERM),
 - [Respond quickly and keep adapting amid COVID-19](#): Amy C. Edmondson, People Matters
 - [Amy Edmondson Interview - COVID-19 and Psychological Safety - March2020](#), YouTube