Manufacturing the new normal

Mrs Buckét

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Introduction

When COVID-19 came to our shores earlier this year we immediately sprang into action. As trusted cleaning providers to our clients across Wales and the South West, we knew it was our job to better understand the pathogen and how to tackle it, so that we could help keep clients and their communities safe and prevent further spread of the virus.

Since then, we've invested over £35,000 in new technologies and cleaning equipment designed to keep our own staff safe and ensure we are delivering the best possible service and solutions for clients during this incredibly difficult time. Ride-on sanitisers for factories, new chemicals, and new rapid response decontamination services, are just some of the measures we've taken to update our offering to fit with the needs of those we facilitate in these unprecedented times.

Sadly, it's not yet over. We've recently seen an increase in demand for our decontamination services across our manufacturing clients and we expect that demand to grow further as we head towards the Winter months. What's important is that we continue to do what we can to protect the manufacturing industry, which holds such a vital role in our economy and will play a significant part in aiding the recovery. Throughout this whitepaper we cover the impact COVID-19 has had on manufacturing as an industry, the steps many have already taken to address it, and our recommendations for any further actions these organisations can take.

By working together, remaining vigilant and doing everything in our power to slow the spread of the virus, we can and will overcome it.

Rachael Flanagan
Founder

> **We knew it was our job to better understand the pathogen and how to tackle it**

The role of manufacturing

As an industry, manufacturing accounts for a third of our economy in terms of share of GDP and employs 8 per cent of the UK workforce, which is around 2.6 million people.[1] It represents 45 per cent of total exports and makes the UK the ninth largest manufacturer in the world.[2] It's clear that manufacturing is a hugely vital industry for the UK and its place on the world map.

Despite COVID-19 restrictions, it is continuing to play a strong role. Promising green shoots emerged over the summer as restrictions eased. In August, manufacturing expanded at the fastest rate for more than six years as companies re-started or accelerated operations following the period of lockdown.[3] Meanwhile, in September, manufacturing registered its fourth successive month of growth as exports grew.[4]

Over the next few months manufacturing has an opportunity to play a significant role in helping pull the UK out of the current recession. However, it does face many unique challenges along the way.

[1] https://www.themanufacturer.com/uk-manufacturing-statistics/

[2] https://www.makeuk.org/insights/publications/uk-manufacturing-the-facts-2019-20

[3] https://inews.co.uk/news/business/uk-manufacturing-output-expands-fastest-rate-uk-lockdown-615106

[4] https://www.expressandstar.com/news/uk-news/2020/10/01/manufacturing-sector-continues-recovery-in-september-but-growth-eases/

How COVID-19 hit manufacturing

At the start of the lockdown, many non-essential factories closed during the early days, with car production for example falling a massive -37.6 per cent in March.[5] During the period, manufacturing employment dropped at one of the "steepest rates during the past 11 years."[6] Supply chains have been massively impacted; the manufacturing workforce has faced reduced hours and pay; and the industry has been placed under increased scrutiny as it continually battles against factory outbreaks.

The challenges faced by the sector are wholly unique. The majority of manufacturing staff cannot work from home, workforces are certainly more than six people and social distancing can be extremely difficult to enforce along factory lines without making significant changes to their layout. This is both costly to implement and can massively impact output. Manufacturers are having to face the difficult challenge of balancing staff safety with factory productivity.

The challenges faced by the sector are wholly unique

[5] https://www.smmt.co.uk/2020/04/uk-car-production-falls-37-6-in-march-as-coronavirus-halts-automotive-manufacturing/

[6] https://inews.co.uk/news/business/uk-manufacturing-output-expands-fastest-rate-uk-lockdown-615106

Food manufacturing businesses and meat processing plants in particular appear to have been hit disproportionately by COVID-19.[7] Barely a week goes by without a media report of a factory that has suffered an outbreak of the coronavirus. It's hardly surprising. Temperatures in these factories have to be carefully regulated for optimum food preservation, and these temperatures are unfortunately ideal living conditions for the COVID-19 pathogen.

At the same time, the nature of the workplace means that while some protective measures can be enforced at work, a lot of employees socialise outside of work, which can lead to the rapid spread of the virus. Not everyone displays symptoms, so outbreaks can be upon you before you even know it. Add to this the fact that many workers simply can't afford not to work, and so won't take sick days if they do get symptoms and it's clear that it's a far from ideal situation.

Not everyone displays symptoms, so outbreaks can happen before you even know it

[7] https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-why-are-covid-19-outbreaks-happening-in-food-factories-12058673

What measures have been taken?

Manufacturers across the country have responded to the challenges posed by COVID-19 with many different measures.

Many have implemented the standard measures of social distancing, PPE, handwashing and creating bubbles around shift patterns. Some manufacturing companies are routinely testing staff, others have reduced break times to avoid unnecessary interaction in the workplace. Others have gone above and beyond to find innovative solutions to overcoming the risks of COVID-19.

Imeve, a San Francisco start-up, has created a platform called AVATOUR that combines augmented reality and virtual reality so that an individual can visit a real remote location in real time.[8] When used with a 360-degree camera, this allows people to walk through entire factories, without having to be there. For potential clients this is an incredible way of showing what's happening behind the scenes, and for managers, it's a good opportunity to check in on progress.

[8] https://apnews.com/press-release/pr-globenewswire/58a852c0dcaf4bc45a993f4f39b4896c

What's next?

As cases across England and Wales continue to accelerate, and as we face further restrictions and local lockdowns, manufacturing businesses of all shapes and sizes should use this as an opportunity to review the measures they have put in place and ensure that they are taking long-term action.

1.

Be clear on your policies

This is often an overlooked rule but it's important to note that many manufacturers have factories across the UK, not just in one location. For many this means they are caught between conflicting rules and regulations.
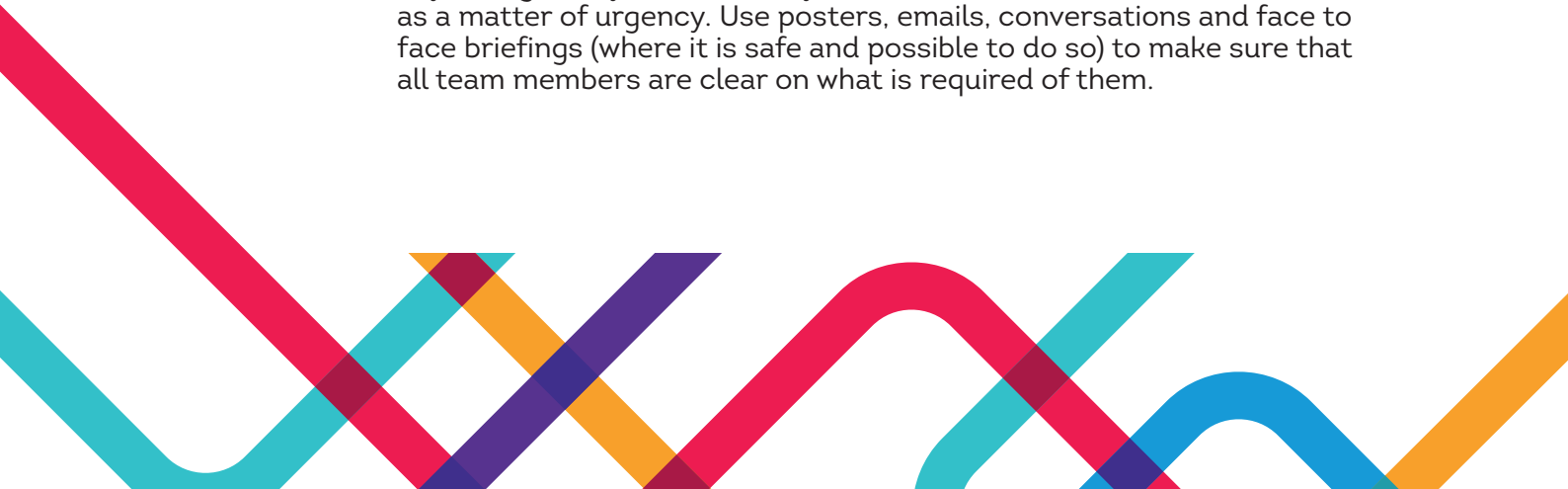
As a business in the South West, we have experienced this only too well. Our clients in Bristol are subject to different rules to those in Cardiff. It can be hugely confusing for businesses and individuals, so it's important that you clarify the regulations that you are following with your staff.

In some instances, it might make sense to opt for the strictest of the regulations, whilst in others it might be easier to follow more localised regulations, particularly if you are facing local lockdowns or 'fire breaks' such as in Wales. If you're clear on what is expected of your staff and clients, you'll make it much easier for them to navigate the workplace.

2.

…. And be prepared to adapt them

The nature of the virus means that policies are constantly being adapted and changed at often very short notice. Stay abreast of the situation and be prepared to update your procedures very quickly.

By now you should have a tried and tested manner of communicating any changes to your team – if you don't then it's time to address this as a matter of urgency. Use posters, emails, conversations and face to face briefings (where it is safe and possible to do so) to make sure that all team members are clear on what is required of them.

3. Make your cleaner visible

If COVID-19 has taught us one thing, it's that we need to pay more respect to cleaners. These people have been at the front line for the last nine months. In the past, cleaners or janitors have been kept behind the scenes, working early in the morning or late at night.

With an increase in frequency of cleaning, cleaners now have to be a lot more visible. And that's a good thing. For employees, this signals that you are putting their health and wellbeing first and shows that you are taking steps to help keep them safe. It also acts as a reminder for them to ensure they are taking measures to help – such as regularly washing their hands, using sanitisers and keeping tidy. For clients, it shows professionalism and builds trust in your business, something that is hugely important for your reputation.

How can *better* cleaning help manufacturing?

Cleaning has a hugely important role in helping to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and throughout the past few months, cleaning businesses such as Mrs Buckét have been adapting to ensure they are set up to fight the virus.

According to WHO, the most common method of transmitting the virus is through direct, close contact, or indirect contact through contaminated objects or surfaces. While the former can be reduced through social distancing, effective cleaning is a good solution for preventing indirect contact.

Enhanced cleaning regimes have been implemented across manufacturing sites, but there are a number of steps that should be taken to ensure that cleaning is **effective**.

Using the right chemicals

It is vital that the chemicals any cleaning providers are using are suitable for the job. We use specialist chemicals that have the European standard for testing and evaluating viricidal activity in the medical area. This product, EN-14476, has been approved by Public Health England for the treatment of COVID-19. Quite simply, if you don't use appropriate products, your efforts will be wasted, so this is incredibly important. Make sure there is adequate ventilation when you're using them.

Having the right equipment

The first thing we do when we're auditing a new site is to take a look at the cleaning cupboard. What kit is being used? Are the cloths correct, are the chemicals effective, how clean and tidy is the cupboard itself? A client's cleaning cupboard says a lot about the current level of cleanliness and the standards of hygiene across the rest of the building.

Dealing with large spaces

In some cases, dealing with larger spaces can be easier than working in smaller areas. We use ride on machinery to de-sanitise and decontaminate those wider areas quickly and efficiently. This is particularly useful if we are regularly decontaminating areas, as it can take no time at all.

Understanding the touch points

While areas such as toilets, canteens and break out spaces are common across most businesses, touch points in manufacturing sites vary from sector and building. One often overlooked area is walkways. Barriers frequently get dusty and are in a high traffic area, so should be wiped with specialist chemicals regularly throughout the day. Another area of importance is showers, which need to be regularly cleaned when they are in use.
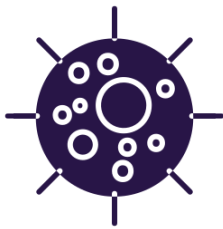
Know when to decontaminate

If you do have a case of the virus in your workplace, it's important that you immediately bring in COVID-19 Rapid Response teams to completely decontaminate. For a fully effective and high-quality decontamination effort, the whole site should go through deep cleaning, not just the areas where the affected individual had been present.

During the decontamination process, specialist cleaners start by establishing a 'safe zone' covering all fire and smoke alarms, remove all phone handsets from their bases and then, using state-of-the-art machinery and an EN-14476-approved chemical, they fog the entire area which neutralises any COVID-19, or other, pathogens.

On completion, the site is safe to use again after an hour meaning that output can resume. And for peace of mind, the EN-14476-approved chemical is effective against COVID-19 for 30 days. We offer a monthly fogging service, which helps manufacturers prevent the spread of the virus on site.

Why cleaning matters more than ever

Employees are taking note of the increased measures that businesses are taking with regards to cleanliness in the workplace. Those businesses who have stepped up their cleaning are more likely to benefit from greater employee trust and improved staff retention.

Meanwhile, those who are sidestepping measures will likely cause irreparable damage to their reputation, employer brand and impact their future business success. There have been many media reports of factories flouting rules or breaching COVID-19 workplace measures, with reports of clothing factories in Leicestershire doubling the numbers of staff on site, but not putting in adequate processes to encourage social distancing and cleanliness.

Cleaning has an incredibly important role in protecting the manufacturing workforce; a workforce that we know involves 8 per cent of the UK's population. Given its significance in the UK economy, it's more important than ever that good cleaning practices are maintained and promoted wherever possible.

> **Those who are sidestepping measures will likely cause irreparable damage to their reputation**

Get in touch

We understand the importance of keeping you and your staff safe in a clean, hygienic work environment. If your office, manufacturing plant or other place of work is in need of decontamination, or if you simply want to have a chat about your cleaning needs and service provision, then please get in touch.

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