



Reopening your commercial building post-New York on PAUSE - by Joseph Roselli

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New York State's phased reopening after governor Cuomo's "New York on PAUSE" order in March doesn't mean things go back to the way they were before. Building owners must make special considerations in how best to protect their customers and staff from the virus upon reopening.

While Outsource Consultants is generally more focused on building code consultation, we have been asked about reopening by building owner clients multiple times over the past weeks, and would like to share what we know on the subject.

Preparation

First off, you'll need to start preparing before the building even reopens so things can run smoothly

from Day 1.

We suggest you start with summoning representatives from all areas of building maintenance to help formulate your reopening plan, covering security, custodial, engineering, etc.

You'll especially need to properly verify that HVAC and water systems are working properly after months sitting dormant, by operating for at least 48 to 72 hours before occupants return. After that, building owners program HVAC systems to provide flushing two hours before and post occupancies. If this is not possible, open all windows, if weather permits, two hours before and after occupancy.

Enforcing Distancing

As social distancing rules are still in effect for the time being, you'll need to consider how to make sure patrons and employees follow NYC and CDC protocols while your building is in operation.

This may require the installation of plastic partitions or similar barriers to ensure people stay apart. Outsource Consultants has been successful during the COVID-19 pandemic advising our clients on gaining authorization to perform construction and alteration activity that falls in line with the Department of Building's guidelines at this time, including modifications like these.

Some other approved methods of maintaining distance include limiting access points into the building as well as limiting capacity on elevators. In addition, common areas should stay shut down for at least 30 days after reopening.

In case of an emergency exit, remind building occupants to maintain social distance when possible while exiting the building without compromising their safety. If you need your fire protection systems checked or updated, now is the time – Outsource has experience navigating fire alarm applications so that you can get those approvals across the finish line.

Cleaning & Disinfecting

While transmission via surfaces has been found to be less common, frequent cleaning and disinfecting is still a major factor in keeping occupants and staff safe at this time.

We've all had that experience where we go into a restroom and it's out of soap and/or paper towels. But in these times, we need to keep a closer eye on facilities and supplies than usual, making sure all sinks in your building have clean water, soap, and at least one way to dry hands (paper towels and/or electric hand dryers).

On top of existing facilities, you will want to provide extra cleaning and sanitation stations in highly-frequented areas. We've already seen extra cleaning stations implemented at construction sites, which have so far been quite effective. Ensure custodial staff are disinfecting the building according to guidance from the EPA and CDC, particularly high-touch surfaces like handrails, doorknobs, and elevator buttons. (See CDC website for a full list.)

Building Awareness

While you can take all the precautions in the world, occupants and staff need to take precautions of their own. You can help others to protect themselves and those around them by building awareness of proper distancing and sanitation procedures.

Communicate with tenants in advance and provide an easily-accessible digital file of safety policies with coordinating signage throughout the building (including any updated visitor policies). In addition, make it clear to employees that they need to:

Wear face coverings at all times.

Wash hands upon leaving and entering building.

Maintain appropriate social distance.

This is a challenging time for everyone. But as New York moves into this next phase, building owners can help bridge the gap from surviving to living under this virus by following guidelines and being an example for others to do the same.

If your work space needs to be altered to better adhere to social distancing, we can help with the necessary filing and paperwork so you can worry about managing. Outsource Consultants is ready to consult with you about any phase of a project and will help you navigate through all the temporary changes at the DOB and other city agencies.

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