



Resuming Operations Post COVID-19

The Next Three Seconds Protects Your Life, Your Loved Ones, Your Livelihood®

The N3L3 philosophy:

our approach to protecting workers from fatal and life-changing events.

Eastern Alliance is here to help. To learn more about Eastern's N3L3 program and access other safety resources, sign in and visit the Safety Tools on www.easternalliance.com, or contact your Risk Management Consultant for assistance

1.855.533.3444

Everyone is anxious to get back to work and out of the house. Did you know that there is an increased probability of employee injuries within the first couple of weeks when coming back to work after long absences such as shutdowns or furloughs? The return to operations in the aftermath of COVID-19 will be no different. It is important that careful considerations are in place to protect employees.

Below are some situations and conditions to be conscious of that may put workers at risk:

- **Employee conditioning:** Consider your employees as industrial athletes.
 - Athletes starting practice for a season (football, baseball, work) are not in the optimal condition. Conditioning takes time and coaches would not initially expect their athletes to run as much, lift as much or work as much at the first of the season as they would after a couple of weeks. The expectation increases over time as the athletes (workers) become more conditioned to the tasks/drills.
- **Heat Disorders (Heat Stress, Heat Exhaustion and Heat Stroke):** It typically takes between 10-14 days for the body to become acclimated to working in the heat. Another consideration is the novel coronavirus and its effects began in early March when temperatures were much cooler and as we all return to operations in May or June the weather is generally much hotter. In addition to losing our acclimation to work in the heat, we will have to re-acclimate in higher temperatures versus a slow progression to summer heat.
- **Distractions:**
 - Employees are glad to be back at work and likely want to talk to catch up with their co-workers, potentially taking their mind off the task at hand.
 - Emotional distractions are likely as life is still far from "normal" or life before COVID-19. There may be lingering stress, frustration, concern, or worries regarding the virus, finances, childcare, and health.
 - Sometimes it can take a few days to get back into the work mindset too. Perhaps employees abandoned their schedules and routine or they may be less focused and daydreaming.
- **Real or perceived pressure to produce at maximum efficiency/capacity:** There could be a sentiment that the employees have had time off and should be refreshed and ready to go above and beyond, that may or may not be true. Or the spoken word or belief that there is an immediate need to make up lost time in production resulting in rushing or overload. This pressure could be vocalized or perceived (wanted and unwanted).
- **Equipment Conditions:** Similar to how people will be readjusting, after shutdowns equipment may not operate as it normally would and may need adjustment or other maintenance. At Eastern, we have seen that there is a greater potential for injuries while performing work outside of normal operations. This could be trouble shooting, repairing equipment, set-up and changing equipment.

Below are some suggestions to consider when dealing with the above conditions and situations that can be beneficial in preventing fatal and life-changing events.

- Consider work hardening. This could be working 4-6 hours the first day and then increasing work over time.
- Stretching: Combine both static and dynamic stretching into their workday, such as prior to work tasks and when returning from breaks. Pull teams together and do 2-3 minutes of stretching after breaks and lunch. There is increased range of motion when there is increased blood flow.



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- Consider taking more frequent breaks or even adding 5 minutes to each break.
- Daily interaction/reminders to be safe:
 - Speak with employees daily and focus on hazards (pre-start up meetings and toolbox chats).
 - Pull team members together in small groups after lunch and remind them about safety.
 - Make the team aware of the items above that could put them at risk of injury as the company returns to operations.
- Make sure all systems are ready to safely come back online through system check process. Increase observations and oversight to ensure operations are running smoothly.
- Remove the pressure to produce at maximum levels. Similar to the work hardening, increase goals over time at a reasonable pace. Management should work together to create a carefully crafted plan for how operations will phase in and progress towards pre-COVID-19 operations over time. The plan and its effectiveness should be reviewed routinely and updated as deemed appropriate.
- Messages from Senior Management: Remember, pressure can be vocalized and perceived. To avoid misconceptions, clearly communicate the company's expectations, plans, and the importance of safety.
- Be on high alert for equipment failure, repairs, troubleshooting, and maintenance, as these may be increased opportunity for injury. Before beginning work create a plan on how equipment failure or issues will be addressed, communicate the plan to employees, and monitor through the workday. Approach the process as a team to ensure work is completed in a safe manner.
- Many companies are operating lean in terms of manpower for various reasons. Similarly, supply chains or contractor's services may continue to be interrupted. This can create opportunity for injury due to non-routine work for the company or an individual. Ensure effective measures are in place to prevent injury and that the company recognizes when risks are greater than their abilities to safely perform and seek alternative options.
- Remind employees about mental health resources and employee assistance programs that are available to them if they indicate they are struggling with the return to work or other personal issues.