

Our best practice journey during COVID-19

We all are experiencing a situation that society has not seen since 1918 during the Spanish Flu. Many reading this article are experienced in dealing with the day-to-day issues of customer demands, staffing levels and managing a facility. However, none of us have ever had to deal with a worldwide pandemic. There are many different perspectives on this topic. Here are some best practices our company is using as we continue to serve our customers while navigating COVID-19.

We first focused on ensuring our team members and customers are safe. We used the recommendations provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, also known as the CDC. We are not medical professionals and communicated to our teams our intentions to follow the CDC guidelines. Right from the start the recommendations included social distancing. We had to adjust the way we operated to allow for social distancing inside a cleaning facility. We moved our morning meeting to a much larger area inside the rug plant to allow for distancing. Our route teams remained in the same pairs to form work pods. Lunch times were staggered, and the break room tables were pulled apart and separated into 4 stations and capacity was limited to 4 persons. We positioned several other lunch stations around the facility to ensure distancing.

Our facility, equipment and vehicles needed to be disinfected regularly. Our teams identified the horizontal surfaces and touch points to be disinfected daily. Task lists for both the rug plant and our vehicles were created. At first, we struggled to master the new vehicle disinfection rhythm and reach our desired success rate. Once these percentages were reported in weekly meetings, the team regularly hit the targeted goal of greater than 90%. The bigger picture of disinfecting the rest of our facilities also needed to be addressed. Woodard launched an electrostatic disinfecting service approximately 4 years ago that we call nVIRO Shield. We apply this treatment via electrostatic sprayers to our buildings weekly and our vehicles twice weekly as an additional measure of disinfection.

During the beginning of the pandemic, most businesses faced a shortage of personal protective equipment. Once masks became a directive of the CDC, our repair workroom started the task of making masks for our team members and their families. We were also able to fulfill requests for these masks by several outside organizations that distributed them to whomever needed them in our community. Working in a mask is not easy, no matter the type of work you are doing. It became evident several months into the pandemic that we were going to need a longer-term solution and that masks will become part of our uniform for the foreseeable future. We again engaged our teams to select a mask that would work for the masses. After trying several styles of masks over a period of several weeks, our teams selected one that works well and meets CDC guidelines. Each team member received several universal masks that can be laundered. Nitrile gloves and booties are provided to each team member and worn into customers homes. Lastly, all of our team members have an issued pair of fog-proof eye protection which is a practice that occurred before the pandemic started.

The county where Woodard is located has a mandate that includes a requirement to monitor the health of the staff. It would be very challenging to attempt to record this data manually. We have a member of our staff that was able to create a simple app for your phone that we call the Daily Health Survey. This survey is also emailed daily as a reminder. Three simple questions about symptoms and exposure are answered in a yes or no format every day before arriving to work. If one of the three questions has a yes

answer to it, a notification is sent to Human Resources and they will contact the individual for additional screening or further action.

After addressing safety, we needed to update the way we communicated with our customers. Our team worked together to develop some talking points and an FAQ sheet. The customer service team uses this data to ask customers about any symptoms or exposure they have had to determine if we are safe to complete the appointment or if it needs to be rescheduled to a later time. Our rug route and residential location technicians ask some of the same questions before they determine if it is safe to enter the home.

Many customers wanted to have their rugs cleaned but did not want to leave their home. Others did not feel comfortable having a company enter their home during these uncertain times. Our first solution to these issues was to offer a porch or garage pick up and delivery. This is designed to be a contactless service. The customer would be contacted post pick up by telephone, or electronically if preferred, to discuss their needs, risks and desired outcome. Our cash and carry discount is still extended to these customers, enabling them to have their rugs cleaned without having to worry about contact. The second solution offers a curbside service at our cash and carry drop off where a customer can stay in their vehicle while we check in their rugs or furniture. The customer then chooses to speak with our counter representative from inside their vehicle or use telephone or electronic communication.

Curbside and porch pick up have been successful in helping our customers to be comfortable choosing how they engage. It became evident as we put these new procedures in place that it was not possible to successfully monitor and screen each customer who entered our retail facility. In May, we changed from regular operations to curbside only at cash and carry. Most of our customers have embraced this and our team felt safer knowing that only members of our staff were in the building. The current challenges with curbside are the additional time a transaction can take in relation to the patience of the customer. We are also located in Missouri and the colder temperatures are currently upon us, adding the challenge of dealing with inclement weather.

Today as I write this, the first rounds of the vaccine were administered this morning to some of the hospital workers here in St. Louis. While we can see the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel, it remains difficult to speculate the timing of when we will be at the end of this pandemic. Knowing what is normal or what the new normal will be remains to be determined. Our ARCS membership is spread throughout the country and oftentimes we have members abroad. The timing and severity of the events of this pandemic have been different by region and for each business. There will come a day where we can all meet again in fellowship and share our experiences of how we navigated this pandemic.

Scott Ring

Woodard Cleaning & Restoration