

Department of Labor Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic (Internal Facing)

The purpose of this cross-agency paper is to describe internal-facing activities the Department has undertaken to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department's top priority is the safety and health of our workforce and the public who visit our facilities. As such, the Department of Labor (DOL) has been adhering to CDC, Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Office of Management and Budget (OMB), General Services Administration (GSA), and Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) guidelines and will continue to do so as they are updated to reflect the changing epidemiologic landscape.

Current Posture (as of October 15, 2020)

In March 2020, DOL leadership implemented a maximum telework posture for DOL employees and contractors, and named the Assistant Secretary for Administration and Management as the Department's official for COVID response. DOL has effectively maintained agency operations remotely and was well positioned to adapt businesses processes for remote work (such as collecting data online and via telephone instead of in person). DOL implemented new processes to facilitate virtual on-boarding, rerouted telephone calls and public inquiries to investigators and employees working remotely, and ensured on-site access for staff on an as-needed basis with supervisor approval. DOL Senior Executive Service (SES) and non-career staff returned to on-premises work in June 2020. At this time, DOL facilities have not yet entered DOL's Phase 1¹. Weekly, DOL is assessing states against targets developed to align to the White House's Gating Criteria that each region or state should satisfy before proceeding to a phased reopening. These state and local assessments are the starting point for decisions to change the DOL Phase for a geographic area or facility. Additional factors in considering resumption of on-premises operations in a state, region, or locality include, but are not limited to, regional impacts, school and daycare closures, availability of other dependent care services, mass transit and commuting mode availability, facility requirements, and DOL agency missions.

Once the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration and Management (OASAM) has authorized a geographic area to move to a subsequent phase, DOL agencies will submit an office resumption request to OASAM, which will be reviewed by OASAM's Regional Administrators, human resources, safety and health, emergency management, and general counsel personnel as needed. This process will be repeated for each phase of the resumption process to reflect that social distancing mechanisms may change as additional employees return to on-premises work, and allow agencies to incorporate best practices and lessons learned.

DOL was able to successfully transition to maximum telework and has expanded or implemented additional resources, such as Microsoft Teams, Cisco Video Conference Lines, WebRTC (for external video conferences), and Jabber softphone capabilities.

Like much of the rest of the government, DOL has experienced some challenges procuring hygiene supplies and with the costs of deep cleanings. To mitigate these challenges OASAM Regional Administrators are working with GSA regarding the availability of Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding for cleaning, the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive is providing market research information for high-demand COVID-19-related supplies, and OASAM

¹ Department of Labor's Approach to the Resumption of On-Premises Work describes DOL's phased approach to resume normal operations to the maximum extent possible, as local conditions warrant.

is collaborating with OSHA to identify permissible alternatives to costly cleanings such as leaving the office vacant.

Coordination Mechanisms

As mentioned above, the Assistant Secretary for Administration and Management was assigned responsibility for coordinating the Department of Labor's efforts in response to the COVID-19 disease. The Department has put together a leadership team to discuss resumption of normal operations. This team is led by OASAM's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Operations and is comprised of Center Directors, representatives from Procurement, Solicitors Office, Health and Safety, and other Subject Matter Experts.

The Department started to conduct internal briefings and coordination meetings as early as February 2020. Information is provided to employees using several mechanisms to include all-employee email messages, messages to managers and supervisors, and a robust internal webpage.

OASAM immediately put into place protocols for potential/confirmed COVID-19 exposures in the workplace as well as appropriate cleaning/disinfection in accordance with CDC guidelines. Created in collaboration with OSHA subject matter experts, these protocols were incorporated into the Department's resumption plans.

DOL has offices in hundreds of buildings across the nation and many of them are in facilities that are controlled by GSA or are in leased space. In these buildings, decisions regarding building policies (social distancing, cleaning, face coverings) are not made by DOL. OASAM Regional Administrators are coordinating with the Federal Executive Boards, Facility Security Committees, GSA, and the DOL Regional Executive Committees. Regardless of who sets the policies for a given facility, DOL employees are required to abide by the established protocols.

The Department, represented by OASAM, held weekly briefings with union officials on the development of the Department's Resumption Plan. On October 12, 2020, DOL and its unions signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the impact and implementation of the DOL Resumption Plan and Agency-specific Resumption Plans.

Internal and External Guidance

As the Department began planning for the resumption of on-premises work, it developed a high-level "approach" (item 1. below) that provided guidance on developing the DOL Resumption of On-Premises Work Plan (item 2.) and each DOL Agency-Specific Plan (item 3.). These plans together describe how DOL will prioritize mission-critical, public-facing activities, and activities that are not fully-performed through telework, while protecting the health and safety of its workforce and ensuring that the Department is able to continue to deliver its mission to the American public.

1. The **Department of Labor's Approach to the Resumption of On-Premises Work** provides a high-level summary of DOL efforts to resume normal operations to the maximum extent possible, as local conditions warrant.
2. The **DOL Resumption of On-Premises Work Plan** provides more detailed guidance and procedures to implement the Department's deliberate and measured approach to responsibly return employees to DOL offices, while protecting the health and safety of its workforce and ensuring that the Department is able to continue to deliver its mission to the

American public. The Department instituted a centralized process for assessing the appropriateness and timing to resume on-premises work at its locations nationwide.

3. **Agency-Specific Resumption of On-Premises Work Plans** identifies how functions and activities should be shifted back to on-premises operation in a phased manner in alignment with the Department's Resumption Plan. DOL agencies prioritized mission-critical functions, public-facing activities, and activities that cannot be fully performed remotely in the earlier phases.

These three guiding documents are supplemented by additional policies and guidance such as DOL Social Distancing Guidelines, pre-departure health screening processes, and processes for reporting, messaging, and mitigating COVID-19 known exposures.

All of DOL's plans and internal guidance documents should be considered living documents that may be updated as the situation dictates.

DOL's response was informed by guidance from the White House on *Opening Up America Again*, the joint Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Office of Personnel Management (OPM) memorandum M-20-23, *Aligning Federal Agency Operations with the National Guidelines for Opening Up America Again*, and guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on the spread of the pandemic and proper planning also informed DOL's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. OSHA provided the Department additional guidance on proper ways to keep our employees safe. DOL's response was also informed by guidance from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Health and Human Services (HHS), GSA, other OMB memorandums, and other response Agencies on appropriate response measures to pandemics. OSHA has provided the appropriate guidance on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and when it should be supplied to employees based upon established OSHA regulations.

Employee Training & Resources

OASAM also developed and implemented two different mandatory training courses. These trainings must be completed within eight hours of returning to on-premises work, if not previously completed remotely.

1. **Social Distancing Principles in the Workplace** – Training for Managers and Supervisors
2. **Returning to DOL On-Premises Workplaces Training** – All employee training on strategies to mitigate the spread of the virus in the workplace.

OASAM also developed signage for hygiene etiquette, proper use of face covering and social distancing signage for agencies to use in their individual office suites and work sites across the country. OASAM also created guidance on employee and supervisor/manager roles and responsibilities for identifying and mitigating confirmed for potential COVID-19 exposures in DOL workplaces.

Frances Perkins Building Response

The FPB headquarters in Washington, DC, is managed by DOL under a delegation of authority from GSA. It is the one of the few buildings in which the Department has control over all aspects of

workplace operations during COVID-19. As such, OASAM wrote and published a comprehensive **FPB COVID-19 Mitigation Handbook**, available both online the DOL intranet page and printed in hardcopy so it is available for all DOL employees, contractors and visitors. The handbook outlines the FPB requirements for daily health screenings, hygiene etiquette, face covering policies, social distancing guidelines, what to do in case of exposure or illness as well as building services impacted by the maximum telework posture.

OASAM Business Operations Center has posted appropriate signage in common areas throughout the building, implemented directional traffic flow, limited occupancy in service areas, assessed needed engineering controls, and purchased/ installed touchless hand sanitizers and Plexiglas barriers (where necessary).

Face coverings are required to enter the FPB and in all building common areas. While not required in office suites, employees may wear them at all times should they choose to or when social distancing is not possible (i.e., walking through the suite past others).