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Science + Technology Perspectives

Future Lab Mods: Four Ideas to Consider

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many industries had to quickly adapt to new safety protocols. Well-designed labs, however, were likely already well-situated, with most having a basic safety-focused infrastructure and protocols in place. At the same time, there are at least four modifications that labs may want to consider making as we work through evolving pandemic guidelines:



1. Space to grow.

Items such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), closed-toe shoes, and

lab coats are all second nature in the laboratory environment. Many labs have lockers or personal storage for items that cannot be brought into the lab. Best-in-class laboratory environments will want to expand upon these areas, providing space where

employees can don PPE before entering the lab, remove and dispose of the PPE when exiting the lab space, wash their hands, etc. This space should also allow non-lab personnel access to maintain the PPE supply, e.g., collect used lab coats, and stock up clean ones for future use.

- 2. Be prepared.** Preparedness is another aspect about which the pandemic has made us hyperaware. The early days of PPE shortages means that facility risk preparedness plans may need to be revised to include a larger amount of PPE held in storage. Of course, doing so means that storage area capacity must be large enough to contain extra PPE.

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EXPERIENCE IN BRIEF

Discussions and presentations at the 2020 I2SL Conference covered items such as HVAC/ventilation and PPE. If you missed our December issue which recapped these presentations, [make sure to catch up here.](#)

- 3. Secure and report.** Many labs restrict access depending on the lab's risks. It may be simple card reader access or something more advanced. In the future, labs will want to consider, at a minimum, implementing the technology to report out lab access for contact tracing purposes. Higher levels of technology can allow you to know exactly who is or was in the lab and at what area(s) within the lab they were working. (For example, Employee A may have stayed at the hood the whole time, while Employee B was at multiple points within the lab.) Such technology helps not only with contact tracing, but also with social distancing. In addition, these higher levels of technology can also include elements that allow HVAC systems to modulate on and off as needed.
- 4. Clean, safe, and beautiful.** Most labs already have the proper materials and finishes from the standpoint of cleanability and sanitation/disinfection under normal circumstances. However, those labs that may have changed uses over time may not be equipped with surfaces to hold up to high-strength cleaners, this may be an opportunity to upgrade. There are surfaces which are durable, cleanable, and able to withstand strong cleaning chemicals, but which also provide the right look and feel. These materials may be more expensive than other surfaces, but they will hold up, and may have a longer life.

From a timing perspective, it is not necessary to tackle each of these ideas right away, or even all at once. However, if your lab is considering an upgrade, adding in one or more of these ideas will put your facility in a more flexible position for the future.

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CONTACT US

Direct any comments or questions to:

Mike Tragseiler, Director

Client Development

mtragseiler@hixson-inc.com

Phone: 513.241.1230

Fax: 513.241.1287

www.hixson-inc.com