



Facing the PANDEMIC

A shift in the perception of cleaning and disinfection.

By Patricia Olinger

In the January/February 2020 issue of *ISSA Today*, I authored an article entitled *Facing the Next Pandemic – Microbial Warriors need to prepare and be ready to gear up and attack*.

Within that month, in late January 2020, the SARS-CoV-2 outbreak was considered a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Then, concerned both by the alarming levels of spread and severity, and by the disturbing levels of inaction, WHO made the assessment that COVID-19 was to be characterized as a pandemic on March 11, 2020.

A pandemic was something that many had predicted for a long time. But in my opinion, while countries were spending billions of dollars on certain preparedness activities, we weren't doing enough in many areas, and nothing at all in others.

In 2020 we have seen many ways the world and business have come to a halt, or at least slowed down. Stunned at what to do, businesses, governments, manufacturers, distributors, our communities, and people in general, were clearly not prepared for this global crisis.

When things were first put on pause, there was a panic.

Pivoting

Like many, GBAC and ISSA, had to perform many "pivots." In February, our two to three-day face-to-face response and preparedness training sessions were canceled and put on hold. We started getting calls from many people asking for help, guidance, and training. Commercial and residential cleaners were being asked to clean and disinfect spaces with known or suspect COVID-19 patients.

And so... we pivoted. We developed the online GBAC Fundamentals Course, a two to three-hour online course that focuses on the key aspects of infectious disease response and recovery, with SARS-COV-2 as the primary example. To date, over 15,000 front-line workers have completed the course.

We found that the training was not enough, however. People were calling and asking for help, ideas, and strategies for how to re-open their businesses with confidence and assurance for the customers, fans, employees, and themselves.

I have a strong background in biorisk management program development, implementation, and leadership. I've been involved in developing international guidelines and standards for biorisk management and am a current ISO convenor for this area of expertise.

Traditionally, biorisk management has been thought of as

only applying to high containment laboratories, such as ones we might find at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But I've been a firm believer that biorisk management is a discipline that applies to all aspects of life.

GBAC had originally planned to roll out the GBAC STAR™ accreditation program in the fall at the ISSA Show North America 2020. However, at the end of March, John Barrett, the executive director of ISSA, came to me and asked if we could roll out GBAC STAR by May. So, we pivoted again and we rolled out the GBAC STAR accreditation program for facilities at the beginning of May 2020.

Before the program even launched, Hyatt Hotels announced that they would have all of their 900+ hotels worldwide accredited by the end of 2020. Hard Rock Stadium, home of the Miami Dolphins, announced that they would become accredited. In the relatively short time frame that GBAC STAR has been available, we've had over 3,500 organizations commit to achieving GBAC STAR accreditation and, as of the writing of this article, over 300 facilities have achieved GBAC STAR accreditation in over 80 countries worldwide.

The diversity of businesses responding has been surprising. We have had convention centers, arenas, stadiums, performing arts centers, hotels, spas, salons, airlines, airports, day cares, K-12, churches, zoos, museums, triathlons, and more!

In the first few months after GBAC STAR launched, people wanted to know more about the program. There have been countless calls, webinars, and video chat meetings. Now we are "pivoting" again, to answer questions such as:

- What trends are we seeing?
- What does the new normal look like?
- And many questions about new technologies that are becoming available.

The shifting view of clean

We are all in this together: Businesses, people, and countries. As we look to the future we need to learn from our experience with SARS-COV-2 and make sure that we close the gap on

both our preparedness and response capabilities.

We need to shift our perception of clean. Shifting from the visual inspection of "does it look nice and smell pretty" to ensuring that we are cleaning hygienically, removing and eliminating dangerous pathogens. The ISSA motto says it

all: "Changing the way the world views cleaning."

The cleaning industry has literally become the cool kid on the block and we need to embrace it.

Training personnel

We are now all hyper-aware of hygiene. Think about it for a minute. How do you feel about a place of business if you walk into the restroom and it is filthy? Do you pay attention to where the hand sanitizer is located? Do you want to see people cleaning and disinfecting? Are they wearing face coverings? Do you want to be reassured that staff is trained and competent and that they know what and how to clean and disinfect?

I viewed the term "hygiene theater" at the beginning of the pandemic as a negative term. Now, everyone wants to see clean-

ing, disinfection, and infectious disease prevention activities happening. Hygiene theater now has its place and is considered important, as we re-open our businesses, to build confidence. The cleaning industry has literally become the cool kid on the block and we need to embrace it.

For years, cleaning and disinfection have been considered an expense. Now, many businesses are seeing it as a revenue generator. "Come to my business, we clean and disinfect. We are safe!"

The training and the education of our cleaning, disinfection, and response personnel are critical to preparedness. This applies to our in-house service providers (ISPs), our contracted or building service providers (BSPs), residential service providers, and more. The GBAC training philosophy teaches a scalable response from routine cleaning to full pandemic disinfection.

We must invest in our people to ensure that they know and understand not only the mechanics of what they are doing, but also understand the importance of hygienic cleaning.

When I ran environmental, health, and safety departments, I always ensured that my staff was provided the training

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and education necessary to do their jobs well, both in their technical areas of excellence, and also in soft skills (communications, time management, teamwork, etc.). Well trained staff are more effective and efficient in their job responsibilities. Plus, they feel respected and tend to stay longer.

In 2021 we will be launching the GBAC STAR™ Academy to help address some of the training and education needs that we are seeing. We will also be expanding the online GBAC Fundamentals Course, and traditional GBAC in-person training, complementing other ISSA training offered by CMI, IEHA, ARCSI, and other ISSA divisions.

What else can businesses do?

Businesses need to ensure that they are thinking about and addressing critical questions, such as:

- Do we have a scalable cleaning, disinfection, and infection prevention program?
- Are we cleaning and disinfecting appropriately?
- Are our in-house service providers or contracted services properly trained?
- Do we have an inventory of personal protective equipment and know how to source more of it?
- Do we have enough hand sanitizer? How will we manage social distancing if necessary?
- What are our plans if an employee or customer becomes ill?
- Can we have people work from home?
- What if there is a crime or trauma in our building? Who will we call?

We designed the GBAC STAR accreditation program to assist facilities, companies, and service providers to address these critical questions.

Embrace change

With crisis and adversity comes innovation and creative ideas. I must admit, I love gadgets and technology. We are

seeing new technologies and solutions every day: Surface protectants, equipment, devices that have sanitizing and decontaminating capabilities, air systems, etc.

As we have seen come out of other crisis events, such as the Ebola outbreak and 9/11, some technologies, solutions, and behaviors will stay.

While we need to do our due diligence to ensure that the claims are legit and regulatory requirements are being met, we also need to be willing to embrace change. This is easy for some, and very difficult for others.

Some of the new technologies will require investing in new equipment and ensuring again, that employees are trained on how to use it.

Moving forward

As you have heard many times before, "We are all in this together!"

The cleaning industry—our industry—is very technical, innovative, and science-based, with amazing people and companies involved.

We have such an incredible opportunity to be leaders in getting through this pandemic and ensuring that people are prepared for the next pandemic.

That's right. Prepared for the next pandemic. Because, as unfortunate as it is, there will be more. 🏠



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