

Guide to the Resumption of Business for Canadian Apparel Firms

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Introduction

The current pandemic facing businesses is causing a great deal of concern among managers. Several will be forced to make decisions crucial to ensuring the sustainability of their activities. They will be supported in this task by their executives or managers who will be daily guardians of continuity. In other words, managers will have more responsibilities and therefore, there will be major challenges to be met.

In order to help managers, we deemed it appropriate to draw up this guide, including content which will be fed, on the one hand, by the common challenges of companies in times of crisis and, on the other hand, by the practices put in place in order to continue the activities while respecting the instructions of Public Health. These measures were communicated to us by companies in the textile sector; we would like to thank them for their transparency.

In short, whatever the current status of your company (temporary suspension of production, in regular or reduced activity), this guide is above all a collection of good practices that can be useful for your crisis management cell, your committee or your health and safety committee.

PART 1: OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES

1. The 2-meter distance between employees

Context

The 2-meter distance must still be respected for several months. Some companies find it easier to comply with this instruction given the large work areas available to them. It is more complex for other companies given the proximity of work teams. For example, for some companies specializing in clothing or other textile products, it is not always possible to appropriately distance the workstations of seamstresses. Whatever the reality of your workplace, it is essential to put procedures in place to comply with this requirement. If a distance of 2 meters is physically impossible, other measures can be taken (see the examples below).

Practices/measures put in place:

- Accessibility to several doors for the entry and exit of employees to facilitate distance between employees who have the same work schedule
- Stickers (arrows) on the ground to respect movement in areas working
- Installing additional tables in the cafeteria and limiting to four people per table (regardless of the table size)
- Install bins to limit parts exchanges between workers
- Creation of extra shifts in order to have smaller teams
- Wearing a mask when it is not possible to ensure distance (interaction between an employee and his supervisor or a trainer, for example)
- Installation of "plexiglass" between sewing stations where it is not possible to have a distance of 2 meters
- Telecommuting and videoconferencing for office workers and certain executives
- Distance of 2 meters between the workstations of the seamstresses and the wearing of masks by all workers.

2. The rules of hygiene and health at work

Context

With the resumption of manufacturing activities, a greater number of employees will be present at work. To limit the risks of transmission of COVID-19, it will be necessary to ensure that everyone respects the necessary sanitary measures daily.

Practices/measures implemented

- Online training of supervisors on new sanitary measures
- Appointment of ambassadors to share good practices with employees
- Installation of disinfectants to be used upon arrival at work and at each workstation (including tissue boxes)
- Cleaning of shared tools and machines after each shift
- Installation of several sinks for hand washing
- Decontamination of workplaces once or twice a week
- Use of a digital punch (contactless) to control work schedules
- Frequent cleaning of work areas, dining tables and door handles
- Display of messages in the factory (CNESST requirement) to remind and reinforce good hygiene habits (bulletin boards, signs, banners, etc.)

Not to neglect

To ensure daily compliance with health measures, the designation of employees or ambassadors is a best practice in that it contributes, on the one hand, to better employee empowerment and, on the other hand, reinforces a sense of belonging to the company.

Other important recommendations (government authorities)

- [COVID-19 prevention guide](#) developed by the Commission des Normes, de l'assurance et de la sécurité du travail (CNESST)
- [Preventive measures of COVID-19](#): This guide was developed by the National Institute of Public Health of Québec (INSPQ)

Some companies can opt for decontamination of the workplace once or twice a week and/or the installation of additional sinks for cleaning hands.

3. Fear and/or psychological distress

Context

In the textile sector, almost three quarters of companies say that more than half of their employees are aged 45 and over (sectoral diagnosis 2020). The older people are, the more vulnerable they become to COVID-19, which increases their fear of being infected. For other employees, this can turn into psychological distress, especially when they have to return to work. They don't know what to do because they don't want to expose themselves or they want to stay with their families, etc. In such circumstances, it is important to reassure your employees about the measures put in place to ensure their safety and to listen to their concerns. Here are some examples of measures deployed by companies.

Practices / measures implemented

- Develop a formal policy to combat COVID-19, communicated to all employees
Note: This policy must contain clear measures concerning the isolation of workers with flu symptoms.
- Daily informal discussions (which do not concern work) to gather news of employees
- Daily meetings with employees: follow up and listen to their concerns and expectations
- Organization of working time (work-life balance)
- Constant communication of recommendations made by the government to employees

4. The risk of contracting or transmitting the virus

Context

It is impossible, even intrusive, to monitor the actions of your employees outside of work. However, you can make them aware of the importance of respecting rules of hygiene and tell them that by protecting themselves, they contribute to the safety of their colleagues. Therefore, the priority objective is to avoid any contamination among your staff.

Practices/measures put in place

- Respect of the rules of hygiene and distancing at work

Note: Under normal circumstances, it would not be possible to take employees' temperature before entering the factory. It would violate their privacy. However, as this action aims to ensure the health of all workers, it is acceptable in times of health crisis. In addition, this reassures employees.

- Use of a digital infrared thermometer (contactless) every morning to check the temperature of employees
- Prohibit non-essential visitors in order to mitigate the potential spread of the virus among staff
- Cancellation of all business trips and organization of videoconferences

Important: In order to help businesses, comply with the new health standards, the CNESST developed several checklists: <https://www.cnesst.gouv.qc.ca/salle-de-presse/covid-19/Pages/trousse.aspx> (reopening the workplace, physical distance, hygiene and sanitation, etc.).

PART 2: ISSUES RELATED TO THE WORKFORCE

Beyond the occupational health and safety component, companies face other important challenges that require several actions on the part of leaders and managers.

1. Employee mobilization

Context

Although this is a period of crisis, employees must continue to be productive and efficient to ensure the survival of businesses. However, several companies have told us that some employees lack motivation due to the current context. Should we ask them to produce at the same rate as before the crisis? How do employers motivate/incentivize employees when certain work teams operate with reduced staff?

Practices / measures implemented

- Create a special bonus to demonstrate appreciation to workers for their dedication and professionalism
- Establish salary increase to support workers during this difficult period
- Mobilization campaign to create a better climate at work and strengthen employee commitment to the company
- Assigning new mandates to work teams
- Setting up a crisis management committee or work group involving employees
- Replacing a pat on the back with a smile to show recognition for a job well done
- Having frequent meetings (with or without a communication plan)
- Being flexible with productivity ratios

2. Layoffs and furloughs

Context

Most companies currently operate with reduced staff and therefore have had to lay off workers. In the event of reopening, do you envisage layoffs because of the economic impacts of the crisis? How do you communicate? Are you worried that one of your employees will find another job during their layoff period? Did you provide adequate support to your laid-off employees? Have you planned their return to work?

Practices/Measures put in place

- Creation of a Facebook group to stay in touch with laid-off employees and to preserve team spirit
- Transfer of certain employees to other workstations instead of laying them off
- Regular telephone follow-ups with employees
- Support in the procedures for obtaining employment insurance or the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit
- Consultation of a lawyer specializing in labor law to analyze the legal aspects surrounding a dismissal decision
- Use of the [aide-memoire](#) on the reopening of a work environment developed by the CNESST

Tools and references

Guide on the management of layoffs and dismissals (Order of certified human resources advisers).

3. Employee training

Context

External trainers no longer have access to the workplace. "This is not a good time to train our employees, even online," say some managers. Some supervisors are very busy. Employees who have been transferred to new workstations must be trained while respecting health regulations, in particular social distancing.

Practices/measures implemented

- For any technical training, require a mask and avoid physical contact
- Online training for supervisors: upgrading their skills and familiarization with change management
- Design of new training plans to be more effective in internal training
- Assessment of basic skills (such as mathematics) using tests provided by the business service of a school board

- Use of external trainers in the workplace must be subject to compliance with sanitary measures and the signing of an agreement.

Tools / references: Guide to training management

4. Recruitment

Context

Several companies had jobs to fill before the beginning of the crisis. Some are still in the hiring situation due to the development of new products. Some jobs require taking practical tests. Here are some examples of measures deployed.

Practices/Measures put in place

- Telephone and videoconference interviews
- Interruption of hiring while retaining the resumes received
- Internal labor mobility to promote versatility
- In-person interview for positions requiring a test practical (such as operating a machine), while respecting health guidelines

Tools / references

- Telephone interview form
- Candidate evaluation grid
- Posting of your job offers on the new platform CSMO Textile
- Procedure posting of a position on your website

For any additional information concerning the pandemic, we invite you to consult the CSMO Textile [website](#), which is updated regularly.