we go the distance

RISE TO THE CHALLENGE

With Particles Plus

Particles Plus manufactures products that are at the forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the company's particle counter found in isolation rooms. Morse worked with leadership, helping to put plans in place to protect employees while continuing to produce these essential devices.

Particles Plus Exemplifies What Employers Can Do to Help Protect Employees During COVID-19

Every day businesses are tasked with providing safe working environments for their employees through the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA). Now, faced with COVID-19 concerns, providing safe environments and protecting their workforce is even more challenging and has upended many businesses and their typical practices. OSHA recently released guidelines to help employers navigate the COVID-19 crisis while protecting their workforces. We turned to Morse client, Particles Plus, an essential business, to see how they have faced concerns in protecting their employees and consumers from COVID-19.

Particles Plus manufactures and sells particle counters, air quality monitors, and environmental sensors. Their products are at the forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic, with their particle counters present and necessary in COVID-19 isolation rooms. Because of their important work, Particles Plus has been identified as an "essential business" under relevant government orders. Particles Plus recognizes that it has a legal and ethical obligation to maintain business operations to support the economy and public health, while adhering to strategies that ensure employee safety. With a small workforce of under 50 employees located in their Stoughton headquarters, protecting their employees is their number one priority. We spoke with Adam Giandomenico, the co-founder and president of Particles Plus about what steps Particles Plus has taken to protect their employees while continuing their important mission of providing these essential devices to healthcare facilities across the nation.

Setting Up an Effective Plan

OSHA's guidelines recommend employers utilize a hierarchy of controls: engineering controls, administrative controls, safe work practices, and personal protection equipment. Particles Plus took steps in each of these control categories to minimize disruption and maximize protections. Additionally, flexibility with the plan given the ever-changing landscape is necessary. Each day management meets to discuss any changes to the plan, based on employees' concerns, evolving knowledge of the virus itself, and business needs.

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PARTICLES PLUS

Engineering Controls

Particles Plus's essential employees were already working at workstations approximately five feet apart, but the company was able to move workers to be at least six feet apart. Particles Plus's facility also has two stairwells that Particles Plus was able to designate one-way travel to eliminate the need for employees to cross in the stairwells.

The first manager of day props open internal and external doors at the facility to allow for touchless entries into various areas – and to allow for more airflow throughout the facility. Particles Plus has also used their HVAC system to increase airflow, and these filters are changed weekly.

Administrative Controls

Particles Plus immediately instituted telecommuting for all nonessential office employees, and disallowed all visitors and non-essential personnel from the facility. The company disinfected all of the nonessential workers' office spaces, and then assigned one office per essential employee to allow the employees to be in separate spaces for their breaks. The company purchased small microwaves and offered small refrigerators to employees for these spaces to store their lunches and other food items. Particles Plus installed individual lockers in each of these offices for essential employees' personal belongings, so that employees would not need to congregate in the typical break and locker areas.

Particles Plus educated their workforce on proper sneezing, coughing, and handwashing etiquette. Employees now receive temperature checks every day and are interviewed by managers on any occurrence of COVID-19 symptoms. The managers additionally collected and populated an emergency list with all essential workers' personal cell phone numbers and email addresses in case the company had to contact them in an emergency.

Safe Work Practices

Particles Plus instituted multiple daily rounds of disinfecting the premises, including one round at the beginning of the day, one at the end of the day, and after every break. The disinfecting routine includes cleaning of all door handles and door frames, hand railings, outsides of employee lockers, copy machines, work stations, and any other areas that are frequently touched. The company has also installed hand sanitizer stations throughout the facility to encourage frequent use, and provided each employee with a bottle of hand sanitizer for their personal use.

The company also had to overhaul how they package and send their products, and how they receive shipments and mail. All products that are delivered are left outside the loading dock. Delivery drivers are no longer allowed in the building. All delivered packages and products are put into a staging area where employees, wearing gloves and masks, use aerosol disinfectant on the packages, open them up and then disinfect the contents using either cleaning alcohol or aerosol disinfectant. The packing materials are then immediately discarded into their outside dumpster. Packages going out get a similar disinfectant treatment and are then packaged in plastic, so that the product stays as clean as possible. Given that their products are often going to healthcare facilities, these extra steps have been imperative to ensuring the safety of their consumers as well.

When mail comes into the facility it is also wiped down with disinfectant or sprayed with an aerosol disinfectant. The company also invested in a check scanner to perform digital deposits, rather than having to make trips to the bank.

Personal Protection Equipment

Particles Plus employees already wear ESD-safe jackets, but the company now also provides gloves and face masks to their employees.

Speed is Essential

As of March 16, 2020 Particles Plus immediately tasked two managers who spent five hours each day for the first week learning as much as they could about the virus, transmission, and how best to protect their employees. Particles Plus foresaw possible issues in the supply chain for their products and made decisions quickly on building up necessary inventory to avoid delays in production and sales. They also invested quickly in supplies such as gloves, masks, aerosol disinfectants, and hand sanitizer. Mr. Giandomenico said they sometimes had to get creative in how they obtained resources. For example, once it was clear that nail salons would need to shut down, Particles Plus reached out to purchase their supplies of alcohol to use as part of their disinfecting process.

Mr. Giandomenico says the swiftness in which they acted helped immensely to set them up for success in managing their business and in protection of their employees.

Employee Engagement and Participation is Extremely Important

Projecting confidence to their employees, and gaining their trust and participation has been key. With all the uncertainty surrounding the world, Particles Plus has tried to make their employees feel protected and valued.

> "This is starting to wear on people, and a lot is needed to keep them engaged and feeling necessary," says Mr. Giandomenico. He notes that it is important to explain "the why" to your employees. "We're not here doing this for any reason other than that we are here to provide solutions."

Mr. Giandomenico was candid in sharing that the particle counters have always been the heart of their business, but now the company feels an additional moral responsibility to maintain production and sales. Their products are used every day in COVID-19 isolation rooms and measure air quality for the safety of patients and healthcare workers. He tries to instill this mission in his essential employees to keep them motivated.

Mr. Giandomenico also acknowledges that Particles Plus has "a lot of responsibility as an employer." In that vein, the company has taken steps to make the lives of their essential employees a bit easier. Particles Plus allows its employees to get personal groceries delivered right to the facility, where the packages undergo the same disinfecting process as their business packages. Particles Plus invested in more refrigerators so that employees can store their personal groceries there until they go home, allowing them to avoid grocery stores. Particles Plus also checks in with each employee every day to see how they are and if they need anything at work or at home. These check-ins occur both on the floor of the facility as a group (socially distanced, of course), and one-on-one with managers. Employees are encouraged to share any concerns they may have, how they are feeling, and what they need, if anything.

Particles Plus has used this time to improve overall hygiene and other processes at their headquarters, too. Every day they pick one employee to engage in a project that will help the facility at large. Mr. Giandomenico's philosophy throughout has not just been survival, but instead asking, "how do we thrive during this? How do we continue to grow?"

Mr. Giandomenico has been in almost daily contact with his Morse team, each of whom consider it a privilege to help him navigate the business and human resources challenges the company faced throughout their response. He credits Morse as an integral part of Particles Plus's continued success, and we're grateful for the opportunity to serve this essential business during the pandemic.