



“Appoint a Chief Safety Officer to lead your return to the office.”

Joel Greenwald

Who should lead your return-to-work plans to keep all your bases covered? There are many internal stakeholders that are involved. HR and legal functions are accountable for people and policies and any components that have legal implications. Operations is accountable for changes to the physical workplace. And finance is deeply involved in any plans that require budgeting and investing in new safety measures.

As processing information and making informed decisions can be time intensive, designating a Chief Safety Officer (CSO) can best support efforts to ensure the workplace is safe on all fronts. The CSO – whether a temporary assignment or permanent position – serves as a leader empowered to guide decisions about return-to-work plans based on changing safety protocols and to ensure that plans are implemented across all departments.

As a “Safety General Contractor” this role coordinates with ops and facilities and is accountable for coordinating with the right people to enforce and modify safety plans as needed.

The CSO should monitor and create recommendations based on the latest information from local governments as well as government agencies like the CDC, OSHA and EEOC. Safety compliance should be their top concern, as companies have already had lawsuits filed against them for failing to take appropriate safety measures. A CSO has an important function in helping to track safety mandates and

implementing physical safety protocols, but also ensures that legal is consulted or informed as necessary.

The designated leader should be tasked with:

- **Creating a safety committee.** A CSO should ensure different stakeholders weigh in on important questions about returning to work.
- **Monitoring changing laws and soliciting guidance from legal.** From liability to workers’ compensation, a CSO needs to confer with legal on changing laws and to mitigate risk in any decisions that have legal implications.
- **Ensuring open and clear communication.** Leaders at all levels need to communicate changing procedures under the direction of a CSO.
- **Coordinating with facilities and operations managers.** The CSO must work cross-functionally to ensure that changes to the workspace are up to safety standards.
- **Communicating as a liaison with local government authorities if necessary.**
- **Consulting with HR or legal counsel on decisions with legal implications.** As the CSO leads the monitoring of and response to changing safety laws, they should consult with counsel on any changes with legal implications.

In short, the CSO has a valuable role in managing change, overseeing the implementation of plans, enforcing the execution of plans while ensuring decisions are compliant with legal.

Leaders may still feel like weather forecasters right now. You can think it’s going to rain this weekend — but you don’t know for sure. Overall, a CSO can help companies try to stay flexible as conditions continue to evolve and the future remains uncertain.

Contributor



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Joel Greenwald is the Founder and Managing Partner of Greenwald Doherty LLP, a national management side employment law firm. Greenwald has years of experience litigating before arbitrators, mediators, and federal and state courts. He has also conducted many in-house, interactive training seminars concerning a variety of legal issues relating to the workplace. Greenwald is also an international speaker, lecturing frequently before a variety of business groups and industry organizations on a wide range of employment law topics. Greenwald is a graduate of Duke University School of Law, and earned his B.A. at Johns Hopkins University. He also studied at the London School of Economics.