

## Working in the Occupied Environment

**MEMO** from Johnson International

**To:** Staff

**From:** The Boss

**Re:** Work as Usual

Next week is one of the busiest of the year, and we have a lot of projects and contracts to close. In fact, we have daily appointments with clients/prospects. They are flying in from New York, Dallas, and Los Angeles to meet with us. I'll need everybody's cooperation and hard work to accomplish our goals. And one last thought, the facility is going to be under construction with the East wall coming down, concrete being poured, and a new mechanical system being installed. (Bring a sweater). Good luck and be careful. Arrive early so you can get a parking space before the contractors get them.

**The Boss**

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OK, so the above memo is somewhat of an exaggeration (I hope), but you probably get the point.

**This is NOT what working in the occupied environment is all about.**

The types of situations referenced in the memo above, however, might happen if the general contractor is not experienced in the subtleties of working in occupied environments. There are four conditions that are of primary importance with close proximity work. These are: safety, odor, noise, and dust. All of these conditions can be controlled by careful planning. The facility manager can and should work closely with their general contractor to reduce inconveniences and disruptions to normal office routine.

Below are some examples and suggestions to consider when working in the occupied environment:

**SAFETY** always needs to be a primary focus. The safety of both the on-site construction workers and the employees and guests at the building must be protected. Construction has inherent hazards. To ensure safety, all areas under construction must be secured to keep non-essential personnel, or curious employees, from intentionally or unintentionally strolling through the construction site. Barricades, signage, and strict enforcement are the best ways to avoid safety issues. Experienced general contractors will provide insurance to cover its team, the site's employees, and others, often with additional insurance provisions or blanket policies.

**ODOR** is often one of the most common problems associated with construction and renovation. Ventilation of the construction site may be connected to occupied areas of the building. In addition, many mechanical systems are not designed to handle construction odors stemming from paint and other building materials. Painting as much as possible off-site, or in a controlled area, can help minimize this problem. Scheduling construction after peak work hours in well ventilated areas is another good option. Barricades and rerouting in-office traffic patterns might also be helpful, but is dependent upon the nature of the rehab work being done.

**NOISE** is another problem in an office environment that must be addressed. Again, the use of barricades to seal off the work area can help minimize the noise. Moving materials in and out of the building should be restricted to non- peak work hours. Music should not be played and loud two-way radios should not be used because sound can carry and amplify within the open space of a construction site devoid of furniture and other materials that generally dampen sound. Noisy operations, such as nailing in floor plates or core drilling, should be scheduled for non-peak hours or with the use of swing shifts.

**DUST** is always present in construction, and worsens with interior projects where it is captured in a closed environment. Dust can be minimized by setting up a controlled area for the bulk of the cutting work. This area should be well ventilated, and cleaned and wiped down daily so dust is not tracked through the building. The control area also helps reduce noise. A general contractor experienced in the occupied environment will take the necessary steps to make sure that the issues of safety, odor, noise, and dust are addressed. A veteran contractor knows how to staff the project with the right crew. The workers must adhere to all safety regulations, be skilled, be aware of their environment, and be professional in their appearance (no torn jeans), courteous, and ever mindful of their manners and their language. Workers should never wander into, visit, or congregate in areas within the building outside the scope of the

construction, cafeteria, and wash rooms. Essentially, the construction crew workers must be able to operate within an occupied environment.

Working in occupied spaces is a specialty that requires a contractor who has experience. The importance of this kind of experience is confirmed by Rick Corea, North America Facilities Manager at ON Semiconductor. Mr. Corea said, "Often renovation projects do not allow us the opportunity to work in empty spaces. If this is the case, it's important to phase the work in logical segments. When selecting a contractor for this kind of job, be sure they are experienced in working in occupied spaces and understand the impact it has on life safety systems, schedules, and costs."

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