



From the Mayor's Desk

October 2020

One would logically expect, during a pandemic, government dollars to be funneled into health services, and away from infrastructure. So, when COVID-19 hit, Pond realized it could be facing some tough times. One of the city's top employers, Pond, provides services to federal, state and local governments in areas such as engineering, architecture and construction work. Pond has called Peachtree Corners home since 2005, and there are more than 300 employees assigned to the headquarters here.

The company realized it needed to balance its portfolio to weather some potential challenges. But, like many other successful companies, it saw the COVID -19 crisis as a catalyst for change.

So, there were two questions:

- What can we learn from this pandemic to better prepare the future workplace from a resiliency aspect?
- What strategies can be adopted as our government clientele address the challenge of safely returning thousands of employees to the office?

What the company had was an opportunity to help many shorthanded, government operations with testing, inspections, and facility design throughout the state. The company also saw a way to be proactive in providing adaptive workplace solutions to create safer environments for employees returning to work.

Pond recently provided design services to Dekalb County, creating a "Return to Work" plan, that included protocols for protecting front-line employees. The work included assessments and architectural improvements to buildings.

The OSHA regulations use a framework called the "hierarchy of controls" to identify ways of controlling workplace hazards. During COVID-19, eliminating the hazard was not necessarily possible, so the most effective measures and engineering controls were identified.

While there were a number of physical changes recommended to DeKalb County, like installing clear barriers between the public and employees, technology was the “glue” holding it all together. Touchless technologies were incorporated on automated doors and various sensors installed in restrooms and elevators. Many modifications, such as touchless pulls on doors, are pretty inexpensive. Pond took into consideration each type of control measure and prevention strategy based on the ease of implementation, best practices, effectiveness and cost.

Since the pandemic began, the Pond team has assessed many facilities in Georgia, scoping out the needs of various stakeholders, and making design recommendations for SARS-CoV-2 infection prevention. A year ago, they may never have expected to be in this line of work. Pond’s recommendations were based on the current CDC guidelines for businesses and ASHRAE standards. You may already know ASHRAE (the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air Conditioning Engineers). It is also headquartered in Peachtree Corners. ASHRAE set up an Epidemic Task Force to help deploy technical resources to address the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Controlling the air became critical after evidence surfaced that the Coronavirus could spread through droplets carried in the form of aerosols — especially in indoor settings. Bringing in fresh air to dilute the indoor air became more crucial. This is where ASHRAE came in, with its research and recommendations.

Installing high-efficiency air filters by retro-fitting air handling units, and increasing ventilation rates in the work environment, helps governments and companies mitigate concerns about employees returning to work. Pond and ASHRAE have been there to help governments and companies understand what is necessary to retrofit their buildings.

The pandemic has forever changed the workplace and the integration of technology inside buildings. Companies, like some of our own in Peachtree Corners, are adapting during these difficult times, and they are making a difference in the world. Even top-ranked architectural and engineering firms have to pivot sometimes.

Stay Safe,

Mayor Mike Mason