

Cindy has been a member of SDA since 1998. In addition to SDA, she is a member of SMPS San Antonio and SAHRMA. Cindy has held her current position as Business Manager of Lehmann Engineering and associated subsidiaries since 2003.

Texas Workforce Commission

The Employer's Resource for Workforce Management

On March 10th the Texas Workforce Commission held a virtual seminar titled "Texas 100% Opening: What Texas Employers Should Know" which I'm sure was full of great information for employers as Texas opens up after a year of COVID mandated closures. Due to technical difficulties and an overabundance of online participants I was unable to log on until the final 30 minutes of the presentation. What I can tell you is that there was a panel consisting of an Employment Lawyer, Aaron Demerson – TWC Commissioner Representing Employers and TWC Staff. I have attended a TWC seminar in prior years and was very impressed with the breadth of information shared in their seminars. I am sure this virtual seminar was no different.

By the time I was able to login the panel was discussing Governor Abbott's Executive Order (GA-34) lifting the mask mandate in Texas and increasing capacity of all businesses and facilities in the state to 100 percent. The panel stated that employers now have the choice to open fully without requiring a mask to be worn as a condition of entering their business. Employers are now concerned with the prospect that their employees will decline returning to work if masks are not required. Employees should understand that each employer is regulated by OSHA to provide a safe workplace. While the mask mandate was lifted it is still in the employers' best interest to continue to follow the recommendations from the CDC and HHS related a safe workplace. It was noted that daily temperature checks are optional, but we continue to see employers conduct these checks.

Let's not forget that we all have a responsibility to do our part to stay safe and healthy. If an employee refuses to return to the workplace for fear of COVID and files an unemployment claim they may be denied if the employer has followed the above-mentioned guidance of CDC and HHS. Of course, TWC will investigate the claim before final determination is made on the claim.

2020 was a challenging year for all Texas businesses, both closed and with limited capacity. It was suggested that returning your staff to the office can be done in a phased manner with ample communication between business leaders and their employees. We have seen that the working remotely business model has shown to be of some success and many people question the need to return fully to the workplace. Employers will have to weigh the pros and cons of that business model to decide what works best for the company, the customers, and the employees.

At the end of the webinar, the panel opened the discussion to address questions posed through the chat function. In most cases they referred to the TWC website https://www.twc.texas.gov/news/covid-19-resources-employers for FAQ's and webinars. Another recommended website resource was the Governor's Office website https://gov.texas.gov/ for employer webinars. They left us with this final thought, "After a year of restrictions employers have the 'freedom' to make great decisions."