

PANDEMIC HAS CHANGED THE WORKING WORLD

To say that the coronavirus pandemic has created havoc in our working lives over the last number of months is probably the understatement of the year. However, with people's thoughts focused on preparing for a return to normality, Wilson Lambe, President of the Northern Ireland Safety Group (NISG) shares his thoughts on facing a very different workplace in the future.

At the forefront of occupational health and safety for many years, Wilson Lambe, NISG President, has described the Covid-19 lockdown as "unusual", and something he never thought he would see during his lifetime.

During a recent interview with the NISG newsletter 'Comment', he paid tribute to the incredible acts of kindness from all walks of life, during the pandemic, ranging from donations of PPE to healthcare professionals and businesses retooling production lines to making products needed to cope with the outbreak.

He also paid tribute to all of those on the frontline in this fight against the virus. "From the hospital doctors and nurses in ICUs to food delivery drivers; they are all playing their part and we all owe them a great debt of gratitude."

CHANGED WORLD OF WORK

"One thing for certain is that we'll emerge into a changed world of work. Social distancing, barriers, video conferencing, temperature checks and regular home-working will become a daily part of our jobs.

"As health and safety professionals our thoughts should be turning to return-to-work protocols, and we need to stand ready to assist in implementing the new normal. We must start with the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2020 introduced by the Department of Health. Despite being a draconian piece of legislation we must bear in mind it is to protect and keep everyone safe.

"It's clear that as safety professionals we need to begin by looking at our risk assessments and indeed pre-employment medical questionnaires. They need to change and ensure they cover the coronavirus. When looking at these it is important to include health risks.

"Overall our aim should be to protect our workers, their families and society at large. The next part is putting in place control measures and these will need to happen quickly. Employers and workers will have to implement new procedures and practices in a very short time."

He claimed that the implementation of social distancing will need to "extend to how we accept and make deliveries as



well as how we accommodate third parties in our workplaces; staff canteen, toilets and washing facilities will need to adhere to the distancing advice".

REMOTE WORKING

The NISG President said that remote working will become the norm for many businesses. "As health and safety professionals we'll play a leading role in this transition," he added, and pointed out the many more challenges to think about, such as:

- Adaptions in the workplace
- Vulnerable employees in high-risk categories
- Mental Health (a hot topic before the pandemic will now become a tsunami)
- Absenteeism

"However, what must also be remembered are the opportunities in the production of PPE within the province, such as scrubs, sanitisers, overalls, plastic aprons, plastic screens and face masks."

He noted that the NISG has a big role to play in providing assistance to its members in the coming weeks and months ahead. "The information we've been sending out has been of value and I see no reason why we should stop this. We've also got enough experience in the NISG to share ideas/good practice and ways to help organisations get back to the new normal.

"Health and safety is still as important (if not more so) than it has ever been, and our mission of promoting workplace health and safety hasn't changed one iota since before the crisis."

This is a synopsis of an interview with Wilson Lambe, published in 'Comment' (NISG's newsletter).