

A culture of cleanliness can combat lost productivity

At a time that economic growth remains constrained, South African businesses can hardly afford further losses due to lost productivity. Those losses can be significant, with the Momentum Effective Employee Index estimating 120 million days is lost to absenteeism every year, which amounts to roughly 13 days per employee.

“These lost days represent billions of rands of possible revenue that the country can hardly afford to miss out on,” says Emma Corder, MD of Industroclean. “One way to curb the 20% of absenteeism that’s attributed to actual illness, is to implement cleanliness initiatives that can reduce the chance of infection in the workplace.”

Industroclean is South Africa’s leading industrial cleaning company that services many blue chip clients. The company is also the local agent and manufacturer of cleaning equipment brands such as Nilfisk and WAP and produces a range of cleaning chemicals for all applications.

With employees often spending the bulk of their time within the workplace, this is an obvious priority area for organisations that hope to limit the risk of infections. While hazardous and heavy industrial environments clearly have different priorities to the corporate lobby or kitchen areas, both require vigilance and discipline to keep clean and safe.

“It pays to be obsessive over workplace hygiene because these tend to be spaces with a high volume of activity for extended periods,” Corder says. “These places are especially vulnerable to the spread of the flu virus and other common ailments, so they require a special level of care to reduce the chance of some infectious virus spreading.”

The starting point for any office hygiene programme is to implement regular, scheduled cleaning of all surfaces and equipment to reduce the accumulation of dust and germs. Daily cleaning should encompass everything from telephones, computers and toilets to the communal fridge and tap handles down to the waste collection and handling areas.

A crucial aspect in the fight against viruses is air quality, which can be achieved through a properly maintained air filtration system. Building-wide air-conditioning systems can circulate dust and other micro-organisms to quickly contaminate the entire building.

“Regular maintenance and cleaning of these systems are crucial if organisations hope to keep the work environment free of these dangers. But the answer lies not only in these large-scale actions that need to be performed regularly. Embedding a hygiene and cleanliness culture within organisations is just as important if the workplace is to remain germ-free.”

Corder offers the following tips on what employees should be doing to contribute to a hygienic office space.

- Always wash your hands or use hand sanitiser to save water. Invest in sanitising wipes to keep on hand and conveniently wipe any surface.

- Clean your phone (cellphone and work phone) to avoid coming into contact with bacteria.
- Regularly clean the fridge at the office and be diligent about employees removing any food before it spoils.
- Ensure your desk is regularly cleaned and avoid eating and leaving food packaging.