# **Beyond the Pandemic: The Critical Role of Facilities Managers, and the New Technologies Empowering Them**

As economies start to reopen, World Facilities Management Day is an opportunity to celebrate the impact FM personnel have on businesses and our health. The past year has shown how critical facilities managers are to successfully paving the way to a safer and stronger future.

As humans, we spend [90% of our time indoors](https://www.fastcompany.com/90506856/we-spend-90-of-our-time-inside-why-dont-we-care-that-indoor-air-is-so-polluted). The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the critical need for the common indoor spaces we spend our time, to be clean and safe. And with that - increased and expanded the role of responsibility for FMs. Today, as organizations across the country reopen - bringing people back to public indoor spaces - FMs are responsible for ensuring health and safety in the indoor environment. As office workers return to the workplace for the first time in over a year, the critical need for establishing (and maintaining) an increased standard of indoor health and safety is only increasing. **As evidenced by data from a recent** [**Harris Poll survey commissioned by R-Zero**](https://info.rzero.com/new-corporate-health-responsibility)**, nearly four out of five people say the COVID-19 pandemic has led them to value their health over their work more than before, with nearly two thirds of people say that their biggest fear about returning to work is that they are more likely to get sick more often.** The office workplace of tomorrow will be drastically different than the one we knew before the COVID-19 pandemic. As the focus turns to public health in the spaces we spend most of our time, an increasingly real reality is one in which the role of the FM rivals that of the primary care physician with regard to impact on our overall health.

Today, technology and innovation (specifically software, automation and sensors) provides smarter solutions to reducing risk - empowering FMs to establish a higher level of safety more efficiently and effectively, without expanding budgets. Each of these technologies (emerging or established) can offer a key into the changing facilities management landscape.

**Beyond Chemicals**Forward-thinking FMs are diversifying away from chemical disinfection as facilities can be cleaned with greater efficiency with the aid of UV-C. Manual, chemical disinfection is not only labor-intensive but can be highly ineffective - missing up to 50% of surfaces, and skipping air entirely. Compared to chemicals, hospital-grade UV-C is far more efficient and effective, offering a sustainable disinfection solution proven to destroy surface and airborne pathogens in a matter of minutes. Long considered the gold standard for reducing risk in hospitals, UV technology has been used for over a century to disinfect water, air and surfaces - widely recognized by the scientific community for its ability to destroy a host of harmful pathogens. The COVID-19 pandemic has driven new applications of UV-C technology, making it accessible to all organizations. R-Zero’s whole-room, mobile UV-C disinfection system, Arc, is one example, currently being used by hundreds of schools, Fortune 500s, manufacturing facilities, professional sporting venues, hotels and more. Designed to be easy to use across any environment, Arc destroys over 99.99% of surface and airborne pathogens in a 1,000 sq ft space, in just 7 minutes.

**Sensors, Software, and Automation**A recent [international health study](https://arxiv.org/pdf/2101.07196.pdf) found that “efficient and effective disinfection of indoor spaces,” will be of critical importance for future business hygiene, as well as cleaning “frequently used surfaces such as door handles, and elevator buttons and switches.” But beyond adjusting custodial practices, some industries have found opportunities to implement automation. For example, a recent rank and file FAA survey found that [nearly half](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/trafficandcommuting/faa-survey-finds-employees-under-strong-pressure-from-industry-and-in-fear-of-retaliation-for-raising-safety-concerns/2020/08/07/11cc3dda-d8e0-11ea-930e-d88518c57dcc_story.html) of their employees believe safety concerns are not being addressed. Luckily, some installations are addressing this challenge. Of course, automating disinfection protocols is reliant on having accurate, real-time information and insights about the health risks of the indoor environment. Spacial sensor technologies started being integrated into office spaces well before the COVID-19 pandemic, and for good reason - these technologies can offer significant support for FMs in managing larger spaces. Some sensors serve as [physical distance monitoring systems](https://theconversation.com/workplaces-are-turning-to-devices-to-monitor-social-distancing-but-does-the-tech-respect-privacy-139825), while others [collect and analyze occupational data](https://www.officespacesoftware.com/blog/fm-strategies-to-stop-workplace-spread-of-the-coronavirus/) to help companies adhere to health codes. These valuable data insights can point staff towards arranging work spaces to increase operational efficiencies - identifying which spaces require attention and which ones don’t. Today’s FMs should also consider new and emerging software programs that can support their job function. In particular, the office workplace of tomorrow will need to be optimized for “[Space Management](https://www.pcmag.com/picks/headed-back-to-the-office-these-are-the-best-space-management-tools)” leveraging [space utilization software](https://coworkr.co) that enables organizations to understand how a space is being used - allowing teams to determine where and when to automate workflows. This technology enables FMs to account for building floor plans, asset tagging, and personnel information all from a big picture perspective to inform office layouts and the best practices balancing accessibility and safety. Having real-time, actionable health risk information ensures better, faster, and more targeted action when it comes to enacting the most effective disinfection protocol.

**Conclusion**As we continue working towards a safer post-COVID world, we should keep in mind that not only will our facility SOPs change, but this [may not be the last time we have to account for pandemic conditions](https://www.wsj.com/articles/viral-outbreaks-once-rare-become-part-of-the-global-landscape-11583455309). FMs will continue to lead the charge in protecting our work spaces and ensuring the health of employees - [every organization’s most valuable asset](https://www.ibiweb.org/poor-health-costs-us-employers-575-billion/). And while the role of FMs continues to evolve, having the best tools and technologies will ensure a smooth and successful transition.

###