Vancouver Public Library

MANAGEMENT REPORT

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TO: Library Board

FROM: Balwinder Rai

SUBJECT: Safety Protocols for Vancouver Public Library Service Recovery

SUMMARY

The Vancouver Public Library suspended the majority of operations in order to stop the spread of COVID-19 and ensure the health and safety of its employees. Now that the pandemic has stabilised in BC the Library is looking to resume services to meet the needs of its users. A three-phase plan was created that is designed to slowly expand library services while maintaining staff and public safety. In order to ensure the health of these groups the Library has implemented safety protocols under the guidance of WorkSafeBC and the Provincial Health Authority.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to inform the Library Board about the process and procedures that are either in place or in progress to ensure employee safety. These include changes to the physical layout, work flow, and work processes that are designed to ensure safe operating environments as we resume public service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Library Board receive the report for information.

POLICY

The Library follows guidance from WorkSafe BC and public health authorities in this area.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

This report frames the safety considerations that the Vancouver Public Library is implementing in order to resume services to the public.

BACKGROUND

In order to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 the Library suspended the majority of operations on March 16, 2020. At the time of suspended operations the Library had implemented several measures to ensure the safety and health of staff while working through the pandemic. These measures include the creation and implementation of several protocols and guidelines, including:

- A COVID-19 Work from Home Administrative Guideline
- Social distancing guidelines
- Cleaning guidelines for staff workspaces
- A Work Alone protocol

At the same time, the Library increased staff capability to work from home, reducing the number of people onsite at the Central Library. The Library continues to meet WorkSafeBC regulation requirements whether at the Central location or home worksites. Ergonomic assessments continue to be conducted for those working from home. The Safety Committee continues to meet regularly to ensure that new information from the Provincial Health Authority and WorkSafeBC is taken into account and implemented.

The COVID-19 pandemic in British Columbia has now stabilized and the province is looking to implement a safe reopening. The Provincial Health Authority has released documentation and guidelines on what a safe and appropriate reopening looks like, including the following:

- BC's Restart Plan: Next steps to move BC through the Pandemic
- BC's Go Forward Strategy Checklist

The Library has developed a three-part recovery plan to allow the resumption of service using direction from health authorities and the Province of BC as a guide. In every phase of the plan the primary consideration is the safety of the staff and the public. The three phases of the Library's reopening plan are:

1. Alternative service provision
   The creation and introduction of new services such as takeout/curbside materials access and a computer lab.
2. Staged re-opening of select branches
   Partial opening of the Central Library and some branches with limited physical access and physical distancing in place

3. All locations re-opened with physical distancing
   All remaining branches and floors of the Central Library open with physical distancing in place and the potential for limited in-person programing and room bookings.

The Safety Coordinator, Safety Committee, and a Recovery Planning Safety Working Group are looking at each phase of the plan to ensure that the Library meets or exceeds the safety standards outlined by health authorities and WorkSafe BC. These groups are also consulting safety information from aligned industries and libraries in other jurisdictions.

The following discussion provides an outline of the safety strategies being implemented for each section of the plan.

DISCUSSION

The Library is a critical service for many in Vancouver and its absence has been felt throughout the City. Service recovery is a top priority and must be considered with care and attention to ensure staff and patron safety. In order to ensure the safe return to work there is significant planning that must be undertaken.

The Safety Coordinator, in collaboration with members of the Facilities, Safety and Service Delivery groups, and the Occupational Health & Safety Committee, is attending the various worksites to identify controls which will eliminate, or at least minimize, potential staff exposure to COVID-19. Front line staff will provide feedback as they return to work, prior to opening.

Identification of controls follows a hierarchical approach. Ideally, the hazard of exposure to COVID-19 can be eliminated. There are two options:

1. Remove the hazard from the worker or
2. Remove the worker from the hazard

Telecommuting is an example of elimination; having staff work from home will ensure they are not exposed to the virus by having to be out in public, in contact with other people. The worker is essentially removed from the hazard. While elimination is the best method to reduce exposure to a hazard, there are other control methods, identified in Figure 1. Hierarchy of Controls, below.
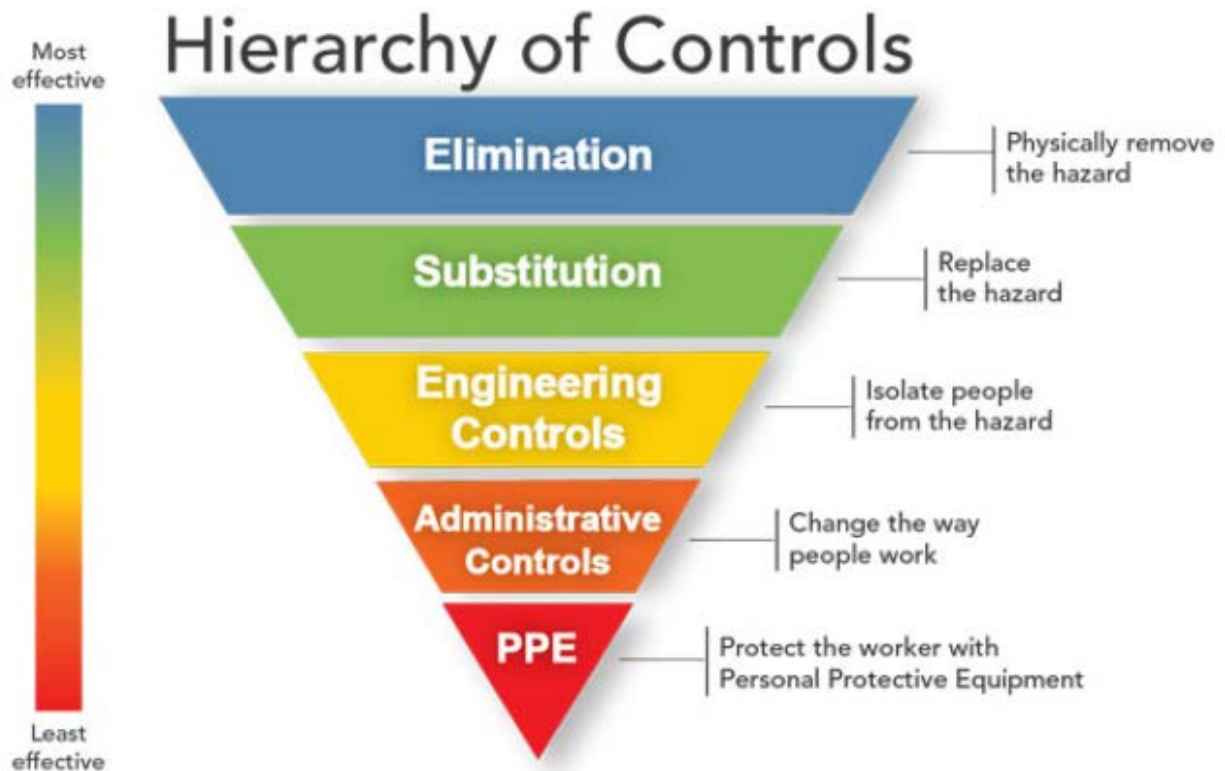
Figure 1. Hierarchy of Controls

As the controls considered step down in the inverted pyramid, they become less effective. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), at the bottom of the pyramid, is the least effective control, but often the control that is first considered.

As the library moves to resume services, the proposed work tasks must identify the best controls to minimize exposure. As we welcome the public back, and as staff start to work together, the risk of exposure to COVID-19 will increase.

For Phase 1 of the Reopening, there are two services that are being rolled out:

1. Takeout Service
2. Computer Lab

Takeout Service

For this service, the best method to 'eliminate' the hazard is to limit interaction with the public. Ensuring the public do not enter a Library facility, nor touch anything that a staff member has to touch, will be an effective protocol to eliminate the hazard.

Additional engineering and administrative controls for Takeout Service are being considered and could include:

- Designing work flow and designating activity zones within the facilities to minimize the chance for staff to cross paths at a distance of less than two metres

- Ensuring doors within a facility are left open so staff do not have to touch door handles

- Training employees in guidelines or procedures to help them minimize potential exposure

- Cleaning facilities, especially high touch surfaces

- Provide supplies and containers for individual staff so items such as pens and tape are not shared

- Posting information for both staff and the public, online and at the work location, that will ensure hand washing, safe distancing and sneeze/cough control practices are always considered

Again, controls should be considered from top down. PPE, while it may be somewhat effective, should be considered as a last resource and not the first.

Computer Lab

The Computer Lab, located in the Alice MacKay Room at Central Library, brings additional challenges. As the public will be coming into the facility, elimination of the hazard is not as easy to achieve as in the Library Takeout model. With computer use by the public, there is the inevitable help request that, in a normal world, would likely draw the staff member closer than two metres to that person.

Members of the Planning Working Teams have had initial meetings and will implement the following controls for the Computer Workstation Lab:

- Develop written safety guidelines for staff.
- Train employees in the safe work protocol, including any guidelines or procedures that will help them minimize potential exposure.
- Post general safety information for staff and the public at the entrance for hand washing, safe distancing, not touching the face and sneeze/cough control.
- Design the work flow within the facility to minimize the chance for staff/staff and staff/public passing at a distance of less than two (2) metres.
- Provide storage location for public in the atrium for large personal belongings (carts).
- Provide supplies and containers for individual staff so items such as pens and tape are not shared
- Ensure doors within the facility are left open so staff and public do not have to touch door handles.
- Ensure multiple sets of keyboards and mice are available to ensure cleaning of materials does not delay start of sessions.
- Post protocol information at the entrance and ensure the public are informed of the expectations prior to entering the facility.
- Place floor markings that show the limits of travel for both staff and public.

- Explore options to 'remote in' to a user's computer desktop to provide assistance.
- Adopt the use of a laser pointer, perhaps in conjunction with a screen magnifier, to allow the staff member to assist the computer user from a distance of two metres.
- Post protocol information at each workstation so the computer user is again reminded of what the staff member is able to do for that individual (and what they are not able to do).
- Provide totes at the workstation that the public will be required to place personal belongings into.
- Remove and clean keyboards, mice and storage totes between each public sitting (45 minute session).
- Provide masks and gloves that employees can, but are not required to, use.

A plexiglass barrier control might allow a worker to stand closer than two metres to assist a patron, and this may be considered as staff gain experience with patron needs in this setting.

Similarly, for the use of masks, the messaging from the health authorities speaks to general safety criteria that will be more likely to minimize the risk of viral spread than the use of a face mask will. That being said, if staff feel more comfortable having masks available to them, we will make them, or face shields, available as needed.

While the first controls for both the Takeout Model and Computer Lab have been identified, this list is not complete, exhaustive or tested. Both tasks are essentially new work, and review of the initial protocol must take place with staff members being consulted for input. Changes/additions/deletions of the protocol as necessary after service starts will ensure we continue to provide the safest work environment possible.

As we move toward phases 2 and 3 of the reopening plan, the work that is being considered will be assessed with the same focus as phase 1:

1. Identify the task
2. Assess the hazard(s) and
3. Develop the controls in a hierarchical manner

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications of implementing increased safety protocols are still being assessed and the June pilots will provide information for this purpose.

FINAL REMARKS

VPL has identified delivering service that meets or exceeds health and safety guidelines as the first guiding principle of our re-opening approach.