

ISS BLOG



Adapting to Reality: Coronavirus Best Practices for Self-Storage Operations

Operating procedures are changing drastically for self-storage businesses around the world as the coronavirus spreads. Adhering to these simple best practices can help you adjust and care for people in these unprecedented times.

Rennie Schafer | Mar 19, 2020

The global spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is likely to escalate in the coming weeks. Countries are dealing with this in different ways in terms of isolation protocols. We can learn from the experiences of the Italian self-storage operators,

who've been in "lockdown" for more than a week now. The following are best practices to safeguard yourself, staff and customers while keeping your business operational as long as possible.

Maintain Good Hygiene

The No. 1 message from health authorities is to practice good hygiene. In terms of self-storage, that means regularly cleaning and sanitizing the places customers and staff frequently touch, such as keypads, countertops, elevator buttons, door handles and moving equipment. Have a regime that focuses on these items multiple times a day, depending on the number of customers your facility serves. Make sure employees are washing their hands regularly and not attending work if they show any signs of illness.

Establish a Communication List

Make a list containing contact information for all your customers, and make sure it can be accessed from off site. This way, if you're forced to close your facility or restrict access, you can contact all your tenants and advise them of new procedures.

Prepare to Operate With No or Minimal Staff

It would be prudent to put systems in place now to operate your store with no or minimal staff in case your team is unable to be at work due to self-isolation or community lockdown. Can you access your systems remotely? Can customers still get to their goods if you aren't on site? If you need to purchase additional technology such as laptops to do this, do so now. If you wait until the situation escalates, delivery times will be much longer.

Also, consider if you can manage the security of your store remotely. Can you view the video surveillance, door alarms and so on? What happens if a frustrated customer breaks open your gate because he can't access his unit? Remember, people's behavior may change in these times, so be prepared.

Maintain Unit Access

The experience in Italy shows that even during a lockdown, people still need access to their belongings in self-storage. Obviously, access rates are a lot lower, but they don't drop off completely. Some facilities even have new customers moving in!

Can your operation manage move-ins remotely? Even if you're no longer manning your store or allowing new rentals, you should give existing customers access as long as you can while maintaining a suitable level of security. If you get to the point that you can no longer accept move-ins, update your website immediately to prevent customers from booking online.

Proceed With Caution

Some Italian customers who are due to move out during the lockdown are asking for their storage fees to be waived, as they can no longer retrieve their belongings. This is a very grey area in terms of legal responsibility.

If you completely shut down your store and don't allow customers access, this raises a question as to whether you were providing the service agreed to in the contract, particularly if the government hasn't forced you to close. Most self-storage contracts have force majeure clauses if the government forces closure as well as protection if you're closed due to unforeseen operational reasons. However, we're in new territory here in terms of the potential length of these closures.

Self-Storage Is Still a Low-Risk Operation

Remember, people don't gather in large groups within a self-storage facility. You can quite easily manage distance procedures and good hygiene practices within your business. Staff members who are ill, regardless if they've been tested for COVID-19, should stay at home. Stay vigilant but continue business as usual until you're forced otherwise by government regulations or staff shortage.

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