



## **TMA Virtual Town Hall Meeting Minutes**

Monday, April 20, 2020, 11:00AM-12:00 PM [ET] *via* GoToWebinar

**Hosts:** TMA President Don Young, *ADT* and TMA Executive Director Celia T. Besore

**Special Guests:** Steven A. Schmit, Senior Staff Engineer, UL

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The meeting opened with a brief welcome by TMA President Don Young. Young shared his observation that customer engagement has increased over the last week, which he attributed to customers feeling more comfortable with the current environment. Young went on to express his appreciation to Steve Schmit and his UL colleagues for providing the Virtual Workplace Guidelines and noted that their publication was “game-changing” for our industry.

Executive Director Celia T. Besore provided an orientation to the functionality of the GoToWebinar forum, specifically pertaining to the process for question presentation.

Ms. Besore then highlighted some of the newest resources that had been uploaded to TMA’s website, which included:

- Third iteration of DHS CISA Guidance, where the industry is still explicitly mentioned
- TMA member sample Telecommunications Guidelines
- CARES Act – information on additional funding
- Multiple U.S. Dept. of Labor documents
- Latest California declarations

Besore then introduced special guest Steve Schmit, UL, who spoke to recent revisions on the Virtual Workplace Guidelines.

You may reference UL’s proposed revisions on the [TMA website](#).

### **Highlights from his presentation:**

Mr. Schmit opened by remarking how incredible it has been to see the industry come together as it has in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. He recognized that the whole industry is facing new and emerging challenges to providing monitored services in line with UL certifications.

The initial Virtual Workplace Guidelines were developed expeditiously in response to a request from TMA at the onset of the pandemic, as states were closing businesses and issuing stay-at-home orders. UL-listed TMA members and others sought guidance for how to sustain service in line with UL guidelines, while maintaining the safety of their employees and customers.

In the time since the original set of Guidelines was released, Schmit and his team have received inquiries and comments from the security monitoring providers, various insurance companies, and government agencies calling for more specifics. Schmit also emphasized the need to maintain and convey trust to customers. This feedback served as the impetus and basis for revisions to the Virtual Workplace Guidelines, first published in March 2020.

The March 2020 Guidelines are not enforceable documents. By using the word “should”, which connotes advice, in lieu of the term “shall”, which connotes enforceability, the original Guidelines were not at the level of a UL standard. Schmit states, even with the next round of revisions, UL is not at a point at which he anticipates the Guidelines will be enforceable.

Schmit went on to highlight and review key areas of the revised Guidelines, once again, recognizing that we are all in a difficult situation. He very strongly advised attendees to make the best decision possible based on the scenario and to document the actions taken along with the reasoning behind the decision. Mitigating risks to employees and customers is paramount.

A joint meeting of UL U.S. and UL Canada’s Technical Panels is set to take place next week. A focus of the meeting will be the development and approval of DRAFT language for pandemic response. He anticipated there may be some movement from “should” to “shall” in some areas. It is imperative that UL work closely with the industry as the pandemic progresses.

When it comes to the monitoring of high-risk government facilities, the U.S. Department of Defense and the intelligence agencies have raised significant concerns regarding the current guidelines. A DoD representative will take part in the Technical Panel meeting. Those with high security government accounts will have additional demands, beyond the residential customer base.

The revised Guidelines need to be more performance based, as opposed to the prescriptive nature of the original. Clarity needs to be elevated.

**Key areas discussed:**

1. **Back-up** – When working virtually, all components of the computer and router must have power back-up [UPS].
2. **System Lockdown** – Computers must be equipped with controls, such as Virtual Desktop. Computers need to be secured when not in use by the employee. Be mindful when an employee steps away from their computer.
3. **Connection to the Main System** – VPNs are recommended, but questions remain about what kind of VPN? Server in the cloud?
4. **Interaction in the Home** – Employees must have control over the Internet when working.
5. **Voice Communication** – Each employee has various roles and responsibilities; make certain the employee has the tools required for their job.
6. **Workspace** – Make certain the employee has designated workspace that is appropriate for the work he/she is doing. Noise should be minimized. Polarized screen for privacy and security may be considered.

7. **Authentication** – Multi-factor authentication may be recommended. There is a need to confirm who is using the keyboard/computer. There are many “bad actors” who are capitalizing on weaknesses and vulnerable communication.
8. **Managing Employees** – Make certain that employees working virtually have a good understanding of their role, responsibilities, and performance expectations. Likewise, managers should have a strong sense for how the employee is working and how are they managing new risks and challenges.

***Question #1: Are there any part of the Guidelines that are should vs shall?***

**Answer/Discussion**

As of now, there are no “should” statements. The closest that UL is to “should” is related to the locking down of the computer. Customers have called for encryption and multi-factor authentication. There is a call to make certain VPN connections are secure too.

***Question #2: When will the Guidelines move from “shall” to “should”?***

**Answer/Discussion**

Revised Guidelines are anticipated within 4-6 weeks. UL wants to be more procedural, but mindful of the expedited timeline.

***Question #3: Will the revised Guidelines be limited to this crisis and be used for future such events?***

**Answer/Discussion**

At this point in time, UL intends to use these Guidelines for this crisis only. The goal is to address the short-term risks and requirements with any eye to the long-term use for future crisis scenarios.

***Question #4: Employees have demonstrated an appetite for virtual work. Do you foresee that virtual monitoring will continue to be an option beyond this crisis?***

**Answer/Discussion**

We will need to re-assess the various contingencies. While there may be some level of acceptance for some customers, there are definite concerns being raised by the AHJ/fire community and the insurance industry, but especially by those with high-level security demands such as the government agencies.

***Question #5: Is there an entity other than TMA to help determine the viability of virtual monitoring?***

**Answer/Discussion**

Yes, others, as mentioned previously – fire, insurance, and DOD. A risk-reward analysis would need to be done to determine viability.

***Question #6: Has NFPA-72 National Fire Alarm Code Chapter 26 been revised based on the current crisis?***

**Answer/Discussion**

No. NFPA-72 is currently in the middle of a code cycle, which is a fairly long process. There has been an increase in the number of AHJs doing remote inspections. NFPA recently republished its techniques for virtual guidelines. AHJs are facing many of the same challenges. Find the virtual inspection guidelines [here](#).

***Question #7: Is there “a future where virtual workplace/monitor-at-home will be permanent”?***

**Answer/Discussion**

AHJs have approved the guidelines, but not for the long-term. As the crisis has moved on, there has been a softening. If our industry manages remotely in an organized and coordinated fashion, the world may be more accepting. Time will tell.

***Question #8: How long do we have to share comments?***

**Answer/Discussion**

Comments will be accepted for 2-4 weeks. UL needs to meet ANSI requirements.

***Question #9: Do virtual workers need a UPS plug-in?***

**Answer/Discussion**

A UPS plug-in is recommended. Be certain to back-up the router, as well. All components in the system need to have power back-up. Companies are asked to think through various scenarios and to document decisions and reasoning. There are other power failure issues to address.

***Question #10: Will states’ re-opening affect the Guidelines?***

**Answer/Discussion**

UL hasn’t given thought to this. UL will not designate to go against safety. Companies can make their own decisions as to how to manage their business and employees. Local rules may supersede UL Guidelines.

- **Comment:** The ability to respond to an alarm and service calls can be challenging. A UL statement to the service side of the industry is to be released soon. It will be in the same vein as the virtual monitoring guidelines. There may be some barriers to response – such as nursing homes.
- **Comment:** May want to also reference NIST 800-46, which is the Guide to Enterprise Telework, Remote Access, and Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) Security.
- **Comment:** UL 827 and S301 both supports “temporary” remote connections. UL plans to make some revisions to the graphs and tables in the Standards to accommodate Virtual Workplace scenarios.

***Question #11: How will employee “idle time” be noted and reviewed? Do we need to revise the time-out limits when working from home?***

**Answer/Discussion**

UL1981, Standard for Central-Station Automation Systems contains the requirements covering automatic log off after a specified no activity time on the part of an operator. If a longer time is appropriate for the Virtual Workplace scenario, we’ll look to that Standard.

***Question #12: Does TMA have a position or recommendation for employee testing before returning to office work?***

**Answer/Discussion**

No, TMA does not have a position on this, or best practices. Companies are recommended to follow CDC guidelines.

Anecdotally, previous Virtual Town Hall attendees have shared that they have tested employees and are routinely taking temperatures upon arrival and throughout the shift.

***Question #13: If you operate a small monitoring center (staffed by two operators), must one be located at the center?***

**Answer/Discussion**

During the meeting Mr. Schmit stated “It is not a requirement to have one operator at the center. Safety is the top priority. However, it is required to have two operators actively logged in and on-duty at all times.”

Mr. Schmit’ corrected answer is: There are numerous requirements in UL827 specify events which need to result in annunciation in the operating room, notification sent to an operator, or similar. These notifications are intended to drive actions to correct problems at the station (reset receivers, manually start a generator, etc).

This makes the question somewhat dependant on a station’s configuration. In any case, it is very likely that a person needs to be on-premises or very near and actively “on-call” to respond to trouble conditions. During emergency conditions like we have now, UL would like to work with stations on an individual basis to find/understand a workable solution for this sort of situation.

**Closing Statements:**

- Please share any requests for topics or speakers for future Virtual Town Hall meetings (cbesore@tma.us).
- Please also let us know if you would like TMA to continue to host these meetings and with what frequency (cbesore@tma.us).
- Leverage TMA staff for information, tools, and solutions
- Share relevant information with TMA and peers

**Next Steps:**

- TMA will host its next Virtual Town Hall meeting on Monday, April 27<sup>th</sup> at 11:00AM [ET] **via GoToWebinar** to discuss challenges and best practices for addressing COVID-19.