



BACK TO WORK: USING INTERIOR GLASS FOR A SAFE AND PRODUCTIVE RETURN TO THE OFFICE

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INTRODUCTION

Fall 2021 marks a return to the office for many workers. Yet surges in the Covid-19 Delta variant and comfort with remote or hybrid work practices adopted during the pandemic have prompted employers and employees alike to rethink their workplaces.

[Forbes](#) reported in early September results of the 2021 Paychex/Future Workplace poll of 630 workers at small- to mid-sized U.S. businesses. "Thirty-one percent of workers state their comfort level with in-person work has declined due to the Delta variant." Additional social distancing was cited as the second most-requested safety measure, following mask mandates.

The desire for more distancing within the workplace contrasts with the pre-pandemic trend toward open offices. And it's not only Delta that has spurred this shift, but a preference for increased privacy. According to the [Gensler Research Institute U.S. Workplace Survey](#) of summer/fall 2020, "U.S. workers want to return to the workplace while keeping the benefits of flexibility and access to privacy they've enjoyed while working from home." Of 2,300+ workers surveyed, 47 percent want a mostly or entirely private work environment. This diverges from 69 percent of respondents who work in some type of open office.

STRIKING A BALANCE

Using interior glass strikes a balance between privacy and connectivity. As evidenced throughout the pandemic, interior glass usage has increased to meet health and safety guidelines. Glass provides acoustic and physical separation while affording visual connection and light transmission. Glass can be easily cleaned and sanitized. It supports natural daylighting. The market offers a range of custom-built and demountable glass partitions to meet every budget and aesthetic goal. Advanced technology features include touchless entry systems, electrochromic solar controls, and a range of color and finish options to support sustainability objectives and bird-friendly construction.

LEADING THE RETURN

AGI provides dialogue and resources to help the design and construction community – including building owners, developers, and employers – make informed choices about exterior and interior glazing. AGI and its members are leading the return to work with safety, efficiency, quality, and value as key drivers.

AGI is a professional labor-management organization representing IUPAT District Council 21 Local Union 252 (LU252) architectural glass and metal craftworkers and glazing subcontracting companies. Committed to ongoing education that serves the regional construction community, AGI provides access to contractors, documents, and continuing education.

AGI members provide many interior glass options, from demountable partitions, which qualify for enhanced tax depreciation, to custom built-in-place partitions, plus decorative glass, handrails, mirrors, and more. Glass partitions installed by glazing contractors benefit from faster lead times, more precise installation, and generally lower costs than glass systems installed by furniture vendors. Owners and architects can reference AGI's Interior Demountable Walls Expertise guide, which describes glazing types and systems, features and controls, and the benefits of working with AGI contractors.

DELIVERING VALUE

Glaziers deliver quality and value. AGI member glaziers undergo rigorous training to understand glass handling, field measuring, specialized cutting equipment and safety protocols, education and training on anchoring systems and sealants, and jobsite safety. In general, furniture installers that provide interior glass partitions are not adequately trained or equipped to handle or install commercial glass; as a result, field modifications – to fix out of plumb or square conditions in existing buildings, for example – often can't be accommodated, creating frustrations and cost implications for general contractors and construction

managers. By comparison, all glaziers do is work with glass, offering flexibility and precision as a design partner and in the field. Glaziers can also provide ongoing service and maintenance over the life of a system. According to AGI member statistics, glazier-fabricated and installed systems can be up to 20 percent more cost-effective than systems furniture and typically deliver with faster lead times. In fact, an IUPAT Key Media & Research study found that 27 percent of glazing contractors surveyed have been brought in to fix installations other vendors did incorrectly.

CUSTOMIZING SOLUTIONS

Glazing contractors can create custom interior glass solutions to meet design and performance parameters. For Lincoln Financial's office in Radnor, Pennsylvania, an AGI member contractor created a glass partition system for 30 offices by researching the parts and pieces of an existing system, identifying off-the-shelf replacements, and fabricating custom pieces. The custom solution came in under budget, several weeks ahead of schedule, and matched aesthetic goals.

Another AGI contractor made critical recommendations during the Villanova University School of Business renovation. The glazing team partnered with the architect to design a custom system with a more acoustically beneficial result than normally could be delivered with standard interior glass partitions. The solution was delivered on time and on budget, without compromising the university's summer construction schedule.

CATCHING A (TAX) BREAK

Traditional glazing systems are included in CSI Division 8: Doors and Windows. Most interior demountable glass partitions are found in CSI Division 10: Furniture, Fixtures, and Equipment. It is important to note that AGI glaziers perform work in both divisions. Interior glass installed by glaziers also qualifies for the seven-year tax depreciation for relocatable wall systems. Systems do not need to be purchased from a furniture vendor to qualify.

Glaziers understand tax implications and the benefits of different demountable and constructed-in-place systems. On the Subaru of America, Inc. headquarters in Camden, New Jersey, the AGI contractor encouraged dialogue between the design, construction, and owner teams to *discourage* the use of demountable glass. In this case, construction savings outweighed any potential tax break. The two primary depreciation benefits weren't relevant: the design already incorporated spatial flexibility and Camden is in a targeted tax zone. The change to traditionally mounted glass eliminated 4,600 linear feet of drywall finishing, offering significant cost savings to Subaru. The contractor's flexibility meant the change was executed without impacting the schedule.

PROVIDING RESOURCES

AGI and its members provide a wealth of resources to support return-to-office interior glass decisions. In addition to specifications, documentation, and BIM integration to support architecture and technical support and fabrication capabilities to support construction, glaziers offer collaboration. AGI glaziers welcome the opportunity to partner with architects, interior designers, facility managers, construction managers, owners, and developers to make recommendations, offer expertise, and shape outcomes that equal success for all involved.

AGI has produced the following interior glass education materials that deliver specialized data and details:

- Interior Demountable Walls: Expertise – detailed brochure
- Interior Demountable Walls: Facts to Know – fact sheet
- Interior Glass Guide Specifications – specification language

LEADING THE INDUSTRY

AGI glaziers lead the nation in achieving Architectural Glass and Metal Technician (AGMT) certification, a third-party, ANSI-accredited assessment of an experienced glazier's knowledge and skills. LU252 has 134 certified technicians, the largest concentration of AGMT certified craftworkers in North America. It's an added safeguard for general contractors and construction managers to know that every individual worker maintains a commitment to quality, safety, and minimizing construction risk.

STARTING A DIALOGUE

According to the Gensler study, U.S. workers continue to value workplaces and in-person collaboration but prefer to return to environments that offer greater flexibility and access to privacy. Interior glass affords the balance of privacy, wellness, openness, and adaptability that appeal to employers and employees alike. And there are no better resources than the creativity and craftsmanship of AGI glaziers. To begin a dialogue about what the return to work might mean for your office or your clients, contact AGI today. From customized lunch-and-learn programs to downloadable case studies, technical articles, and profiles, AGI and its members offer tools and expertise to support your design, construction, and business goals.

LEARN MORE

For more information about how AGI member glaziers can support your glazing needs, contact info@theagi.org.

[View the AGI Project Case Studies.](#)

[Find an AGI Member Glazing Contractor.](#)