

## In The News

# Add Munsch Hardt to List of Texas Firms With Fully Open Offices

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*Texas Lawyer*

Munsch Hardt's CEO Phil Appenzeller speaks with Texas Lawyer on the office's plan to fully reopen on May 3. In the featured article, Appenzeller speaks on the decision to return to office and how it will impact the future of our workforce.

Read the full article below:

With most of its lawyers and staff already vaccinated, Munsch Hardt Kopf & Harr will fully reopen its offices May 3, more than a year after everyone started working remotely due to the coronavirus.

While many firms, particularly Big Law firms with a network of offices, continue to limit the numbers of lawyers and staff in offices as local regulations vary, 144-lawyer Munsch Hardt and other midsize firms in Texas may have more leeway. Some midsize Texas firms have been long open, such as BoyarMiller and Ahmad, Zavitsanos, Anaipakos, Alavi & Mensing, although return dates for U.S. firms are all over the map, with some large firms already announcing that they will not fully reopen offices until 2022.

Munsch Hardt chief executive officer Phil Appenzeller said the firm is prepared for the reopening with safety protocols and most lawyers and staff are excited about the change.

"We've been very, very conservative. We didn't want to put our employees at any risk. If I didn't believe we could do it safely, we wouldn't be doing it," he said.

One factor that paves the way for Munsch Hardt to fully reopen is the fact that in March, Gov. Greg Abbott issued an executive order opening Texas "100%." With that, the increasing availability of vaccines, and a recommendation from a doctor at a workplace risk management company, Appenzeller said the firm's management made the decision to reopen fully.

Since last June, Haven Diagnostics, a workplace risk management company in New York, has advised the firm on how to handle the pandemic. Appenzeller said the doctor suggested a May 3 return date, taking into account the vaccine rollout and safety protocols at the firm's offices.

The firm is not requiring lawyers and staff to get a vaccine to return to the office, but is requiring everyone to come back to the firm's three offices May 3, he said.

"It is going back to the way it was pre-pandemic," he said.

Like other firms, Appenzeller said, Munsch Hardt transitioned to remote work last March. But the firm reopened its offices on a voluntary basis last June, after Abbott issued orders easing restrictions. Since then, the Dallas office has operated at about 25% of capacity, with the percentage a little lower in Houston and Austin, he said.

Employees were given nine weeks' notice about the May 3 date, to give those with young children time to make arrangements. The firm also held a vaccine clinic in its Dallas office Wednesday for employees and families, and will do the same soon in Houston and Austin.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Munsch Hardt did not have a remote work policy and is not instituting one now, Appenzeller said.

"The message we are sending is we think for our culture and our client services, having our lawyers and staff back in the office is better," he said.

One big reason to return, he said, is integrating the 19 lawyers the firm hired last year, including a group of four health care lawyers in Houston who came from Baker Donelson, and another seven already hired in 2021, Appenzeller said. Another is training and mentoring of young associates, because "doing it by email or Zoom or phone, it's just not as efficient."

With offices open, the firm plans an in-person summer associate program. The firm canceled the program last year, but Appenzeller said those law students, now graduates, have been invited for a special three-week summer associate program this summer after which they would be considered for employment.

Appenzeller said he looks forward to seeing everyone in the office. He's actually been working in the Dallas office throughout the pandemic, noting that he only lasted two days at home, finding that it was better to do Zoom calls from the office than in his echoey house.

"I've been here since last March. I'm excited to see faces again," he said.

The full article can be found [here](#).

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