



**COVID19 BUSINESS
SAFETY MEASURES & PLANS**

JUNE 2020



COVID-19 WORKPLACE SAFETY GUIDANCE TO STAFF REOCCUPATION AND REVIEW OF WORKPLACE PRACTICES



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Forward from Jonathan Cunningham

These are unprecedented times with both human and commercial life under threat. It is only right that we should plan for the reablement of the work environment. For some businesses the epidemic has completely stopped all commercial activity, for some, working practices have altered to allow some business to continue and for a few it has been business as usual.

Whatever your circumstance the correct planning and phased recommencement of work is essential. Failure to put adequate risk assessments in place may leave you vulnerable to claim and in extremis could cost the lives of your staff.

The following directive provides outline areas for consideration.

If you require additional assistance with your workplace risk assessments, design, signage, new work practise method statements or indeed staff virtual training. Then we will be delighted to assist. Just email or phone and let’s have a chat.

So, don’t worry just email us today and we can assist.

Stay safe!

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COVID-19 WORKPLACE SAFETY GUIDANCE TO STAFF REOCCUPATION AND REVIEW OF WORKPLACE PRACTICES

Overview

This document has been produced by STORM Consultancy to provide clear guidance and considerations during the return to work or reoccupation of premises, building and facilities during the COVID-19 (CV) epidemic. It is generally accepted that the CV virus will remain in place for some time. Some work practices are unlikely to return to pre CV situation. Nevertheless, a commercial return to work is essential for UK business to recover. All workplaces regardless of nature must make appropriate alterations to former working practice in order to keep their staff safe over this new period of commercial re-engagement where social distancing and added safety measures will be necessary.

The purpose of this directive

The purpose of this directive is:

1. To provide risk based guidance to your company/business/organisation and members of staff on how to implement suitable and sensible working practices during the covid-19 outbreak that allows for commercial activity to be established.
2. To provide sensible work risk assessments for other work related activities in connection with the covid-19 outbreak.

This guidance is specifically for organisations and STORM clients who may have stopped or restricted work activity since the enforced lockdown. These organisations may be considering a phased return of staff

Safety Methodology

There are three activities that must be implemented before the reoccupation of the workspace. These include:

1. The conduct of a pre-return to work risk assessment based on individuals and their activities.
2. Consideration of the risks of re-occupying facilities, premises and restarting equipment that may have been switched off for an extended period of time.
3. Review and amendment of existing risk assessments in light of new work patterns, routines, social distancing and limited face-to-face meetings or customer contact that may have to occur.

These risk assessments remain dynamic and must be continually reappraised and reviewed. It must be acknowledged that it may be some time before UK working practices reflect the situation several months prior to the start of the CV outbreak. All companies and industries must assume there will be a phased return to the workplace but undoubtedly most working practices will amend, change and make use of the improved working practices and opportunities brought about by this collective, mutually shared experience.

Understanding the risk associated with COVID-19 and its means of transmission/infection

All staff and managers must appreciate and understand how the virus transmits and spreads between people. In essence, this is relatively simple as there are only two means of routes of transmission:

1. Transmission via respiratory droplets. These transferring from one infected host to an uninfected hosts or person. This may occur through coughing, sneezing, blowing one's nose, but also may occur through normal breathing. Routinely respiratory droplets **do not** remain airborne for long periods of time and therefore routine social distancing of up to 2m is sufficient to protect most people from this means of transmission.
2. Transmission via contaminated surfaces. This is where the virus is transmitted through contaminated surfaces such as door handles, tools, handrails, etc and that member of staff then touches their eyes, nose or mouth allowing the infection transmission to occur. Regular cleaning and decontamination of these surfaces and making people aware of these high traffic touchpoints will reduce the risk of transmission and infection.

Therefore protecting staff through social distancing and ensuring people are aware of the risk of contaminated surfaces is the best means of establishing a more protected place of work. It is advised to use the HSE Hierarchy of Risk Control which set out a clear priority order in order to reduce the risk of hazardous activity. These include:

Hierarchy of Controls - Don't start with gloves and masks!



Eliminate the risk

- Identify those members of staff that cannot work from home and therefore are the ones to potentially return first.
- Identify those who are at most health risk as they should remain at home for the longest.
- Facilitate home working for as long as feasibly possible for those who can work effectively at home or those who are health compromised.
- Conduct a 'return to work' telephone interview with staff to identify those who are at greater risk and therefore may require added control measures and risk assessment or ongoing shielding.
- Ensure all staff are familiar with self-health assessment i.e.: not to enter the workplace if they're feeling unwell. This is based on temperature, respiratory issues, general aches and pains.
- Workers who are unwell should self-isolate in accordance with the government direction and should not travel or attend the workplace.
- Identify those tasks that may be conducted by one person only.
- Identify previous practices of face-to-face meetings and seek alternative arrangements such as video conferencing or team collaboration technology.
- Consider changes to the work environment such as facilities, canteen and arrival foyer where social distancing can be physically problematic.
- Stairs should be used to avoid the risks of confined space such as lifts.

Reducing Exposure & isolating the risk

- Minimise the time workers are in close proximity to others. Flexible working applied to the working day may possibly allow for a mix of both on-site and off-site employment.
- Alterations to shift patterns should be considered to allow for a staggered start, thereby reducing congestion in entrance foyers, staff rooms, car parks, stairwells and canteens or recreation zones specifically over breaks and lunch periods.
- Minimise the period or duration of unavoidable 'face to face' meetings, this could include meetings lasting no longer than 15 minutes etc.
- Establish regular cleaning of common touchpoints, doors, buttons, handles, stair handrails, tools and other high frequency touch equipment.
- Introduce pop-up hand-wash stations with sanitising hand gel at entrance ways, canteen areas, door entrances/exits.
- Make additional cleaning materials available in the workplace for staff to clean their immediate workplace vicinity and also common facilities such as canteen, toilets etc.
- Review the performance and servicing of mechanical ventilation and air conditioning systems. Use fresh air in preference to recirculated air.
- Increase ventilation in enclosed spaces.
- Enforce the washing of hands before and after using any shared equipment such as tools.
- Consider the use of Windows to maintain fresh air circulation throughout the workplace.
- Consider temperature screening on entry during the day.
- Consider establishing one-way system of transit through the workplace.
- Establish additional signage to ensure all staff are fully aware of the 2 m rule.

Safe Systems of Control & Training

- Establish clear communication with all members of staff on the phased return back to work and the procedures that must be adopted on their arrival. Don't surprise them!
- Ensure that all staff are fully aware of these procedures and have acknowledged these through signature or email confirmation.
- Reassess & review your safe systems of control and risk assessments and make appropriate amendments to account for social distancing, new protocols etc.
- It is advised to establish a small video that can illustrate to your staff the newly designed workplace and their responsibilities when they return to work.
- Establish daily compliance check sheet that should be completed by a suitable supervisor or manager.
- Ensure all staff are re-familiarised with their workplace environment, equipment, work processes and risk assessments.
- Consider physical adjustments that might be necessary, as many staff may not be physically prepared to recommence work they conducted several months ago. This is especially true for manual handling and more physically demanding employment.

Personal Protective Equipment

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is the final means of protection for a member of staff. If 2m cannot be guaranteed, facemasks **should be considered** for a limited period. It is not recommended that members of staff are forced to wear facemasks as throughout the day this can become particularly claustrophobic, creates a false sense of security and ultimately if social distancing **is** maintained then there should be **no requirement** for such face masks.

Gloves throughout the day, should **not be worn**, (Unless require for other safety reasons e.g. manual handling), as these provide a false sense of security and can aid the transmission of the virus throughout the workplace. Thorough and effective hand washing is by far the greatest means of protection. Effective soap and water hand washing should be encouraged at all times, not merely the gelling of hands.

First Aid Provision

The company remains responsible for the provision of effective first aid in the workplace. However, aspects of first aid provision and delivery should be reviewed and amended in accordance with the added risks of CV. The following points should be considered:

1. Review and make amendments on the number of available & suitably first aid trained staff in the organisation. This may have changed.
2. Consider the refreshing of first aid should it be required.
3. Ensure first aid responders are aware are of the increased risk due to aerosol generating procedures such as CPR. A wet flannel should be administered and placed over the mouth and nose. Mouth to mouth rescue breaths should not be delivered.
4. Consider that first aid provision may be delayed due to the lack of available 999 resources.
5. Reduce or stop high risk activities where additional first aid maybe required.

Workplace Infection Control

All workplaces must make adequate provision for additional cleaning of surfaces that may be contaminated. Specific focus should be directed on high traffic, high volume touch points. These include:

- Taps and washing facilities.
- Toilet flush handles and seats.
- Door handles and push plates.
- Handrails on staircases corridors and stairwells.
- Lift and hoist controls including buttons.
- Machinery and equipment controls.
- Areas where people congregate including; catering areas, recreation and assembly halls or rooms.
- Telephone equipment.
- Keyboards photocopiers and other office equipment where touching is unavoidable.
- Rubbish collection points such as bins.

The safe re-occupation of premises, facilities and work sites

It must be recognised and accepted that the reoccupation of premises and buildings will present increase risks to the employer and employees. This includes risks to the building fabric and also equipment that may be switched on after extended periods of inactivity. Specifically, high risk equipment includes those involving hydraulics oils, high pressure steam and equipment that use compressed air. Equipment and activities that fall under the regulations must have specific safe procedures for the restarting of hazardous equipment.

It is recommended that a re-enablement or 'activation team' including senior engineers, plant managers or facilities HSE managers should be involved in the safe restart of plant and equipment. The activation or restart process should be conducted where minimal personnel are on-site and thereby reduce the risk to increased numbers of staff in the initial restart period. Some equipment are recommended to go through a number of test runs to ensure the company is suitably satisfied the equipment and plant operates correctly and safely under a range of operating parameters.

Facility and restart considerations

1. **Fire.** The functionary testing of the full fire alarm, emergency lighting system and visual inspection of all fire extinguishers, safe escape routes and operational checks on all fire doors and smoke venting systems.
2. **Restarting plant and equipment.** Particular caution and attention should be drawn to items that may possess stored energy such as conveyors and hydraulic systems and those that may be pressurised. All equipment and machinery must be thoroughly inspected, tested and serviced (if necessary) and recorded before staff use.

3. **Statutory inspection compliance.** These may include LOLER, Pressure Systems Safety Regulations & Gas Safe. These should be reviewed to ensure they remain in safe certification. Surveys of equipment that may be of more concern. These should be reviewed in light of the extended period of inactivity and re-inspected and serviced.
4. **Local exhaust ventilation LEV.** They should be reviewed and inspected in light of preferring fresh air intake rather than recirculated air that could inadvertently spread the virus throughout the workplace, especially those within a confined workspace.
5. **Legionella.** This is a specific and very real risk due to the stagnation of water in water tanks, dead ends and remote sentinel points. Warm water systems should be reviewed, flushed and any aerosol generating heads such as showers should be disinfected before switching on. It is strongly advised to re-commission an inspection for extended large complex plants such as hotels and other facilities that may have remained dormant for the last few months. Wide spread testing of water to test for bacterial growth should be undertaken.
6. **Asbestos Containing Materials.** The asbestos register should be reviewed and a visual inspection arranged for asbestos containing materials (ACM) to ensure that no deterioration, possibly through water ingress over the lockdown period, has occurred.
7. **General hygiene.** Prior to reoccupation the whole site and facility should be thoroughly cleaned. This includes all welfare facilities such as toilets, canteens and bin stores. Fridges within canteens should also be deep cleaned as these may have discarded food material left prior to lockdown.
8. **Pest control.** Pest control should be considered as several boxes and traps may now be occupied and require emptying and resetting.
9. **General staff fitness and physical capability.** Those industries that involve physical manual handling; such as construction and possibly manufacturing where staff work on a plant line. The staff should be reviewed in light of extended periods of inactivity. Manual handling should be reviewed to include one-person capable lifts. Where social distancing is not possible additional barriers such as PPE face guards and visors should be considered. It is preferable that all operations and lifting involve single person lifts and tasks.

10. **Retraining and re-familiarisation.** Many members of staff may require retraining, especially those operating complex plant and equipment. An induction period should be enabled to revise members of staff on the new risk assessments, safe systems of work and emergency procedures for plant and equipment.
11. **Mental well-being.** Many members of staff may have been in isolation for extended periods of time. The thought of returning to work could be incredibly stressful and filled with anxiety over the job, the environment and the possibility of catching the virus whilst in the workplace. Discussion and clear lines of communication is the recommended approach to ensure all members of staff feel supported at this time. It must also not be forgotten that members of staff may have lost members of the family due to the coronavirus and therefore may be suffering from bereavement at this incredibly anxious period. Effective welfare support structures need to be considered including helplines, buddy or mentoring arrangements and appropriate supervisions that may be conducted via phone, Skype, video or very limited meetings held with responsible social distancing.

Awareness of increase risks due to new work procedures

The introduction of new procedures brings with it increased risks. These may be due to the increased requirement of lone or remote working and changes to the previous systems of work. Main considerations should be applied to the following:

- A. Increased lone or remote working.
- B. Working from home risk assessments.
- C. Making changes to working practices for the medium and long-term.

Changes to work practices – key considerations

1. Timings of the working day. Does the start and finish time with additional staff add to the congestion with those already attending work? Can this be adjusted or staggered to avoid concentrated clashes? Focus on areas of possible concentration such as entranceways, car parks lobbies, turnstiles, stairs, lifts, corridors, changing areas, shower facilities, canteens, recreational zones and meeting areas.

2. **Office or Work Space Capacity.** Assess the maximum capacity of each office and building and ensure that desks and facilities are laid out to reflect the seating arrangement of 2 m apart. Excess seating should be removed. An assessment on safe concentrations within corridors, entrance and welfare facilities should be considered to avoid congestion. Considerations:
- a. Are there unused or underutilized offices or meeting rooms where staff can be relocated in order to spread the social distancing? Do not just consider desk areas.
 - b. Where social distancing challenges remain are Perspex screens required to be fitted? Staff should not face one another unless there is adequate protection such as screens and boards in between.
 - c. In open plan offices can attendance on site be rotated e.g. half day in the office/home?
 - d. Consider additional signage that aids comprehension and direction. Do you require floor signage in order to enhance social distancing?
 - e. Do you require to establish a one-way system within the office or factory environment?
 - f. For those staff that require high frequency face to face visits such as cash points, HR advisors, reception do they require a protective screen arrangement hatch or stable door, or modified visor to ensure physical distancing is maintained and they are protected from aerosol generating coughs from visiting staff or public?
 - g. Do you require to establish increased cleaning of walkways, door handles, waste removal etc? Do you require to establish more frequent cleaning of high touch equipment such as photocopiers, keyboards, tools, touch screens etc Can these be cleaned during out-of-hours where no other personnel or present?
 - h. Do you require to stop and prevent hot desking which increases the risk of infection? Where hot desking is unavailable consider issuing staff their own keypad keyboard and mouse?
 - i. Do you require purchasing foot operated bins for your canteen or workspace? These will reduce the risk of infection control as it reduces the requirements physical touch.

- j. Canteen breakout areas? Consider the restocking of vending machines. What are the arrangements for the restocking and the cleaning of this equipment? Is it possible to arrange a cashless system?
 - k. Can seating arrangements be made to allow for seating at a distance of 2m between seats and to minimise face-to-face seating?
3. **Meeting arrangements.** Staff should be encouraged to reduce the physical requirement to meet face to face. Full arrangements including the use of telecommunications, Skype, Zoom and other technological solutions should be considered first and foremost. Where unavoidable, meeting rooms should ensure seats are well spaced with people arriving staggered to avoid concentrations at the entrance door.
4. **Communicating with your staff.** During times of crisis and especially during this period of unsettled operation it is advised to ensure that maximum communication is established with your staff. This reduces the opportunity for rumour and gossip. The use of a WhatsApp or Facebook groups could assist the timely dissemination of information across the workforce. Ensure you have adequate policies in place for this.

Emergency Action Plans and Business Continuity

Business continuity and emergency action plans should be considered in the light of the CV situation. Considerations include:

1. The repositioning or review of the exit procedures and assembly procedures in the event of fire or site evacuation.
2. The retesting of all emergency procedures ensuring that all functional emergency systems are actually operational and work when required. See fire procedures above.
3. Reappraisal of the organisation Person Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEPs) to account for less available people to assist.
4. Evacuation staging to allow for phased evacuation of the premises to avoid bunching on stair wells. [Note this is managed risk. If the building is on fire – JUST GET OUT]
5. Rehearsal and practise of the amended procedures with reduced staff.
6. Reallocation of the emergency duties as laid down in the former emergency procedures.



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