COVID-19: RE-STARTING FOR PROPERTY OWNERS

Re-occupying premises after a temporary shutdown, period of reduced occupancy or operations can present specific hazards, which if not planned or managed properly, can result in damage, injury, legal action and further disruption to your business.

HERE'S WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR:

Where activities are either scaled up or scaled down compared to the pre-shutdown period, there can be increased risk of:

- fire / explosion
- machinery / plant damage or breakdown
- injury.

These may be caused by a variety of factors including delayed maintenance cycles and frequent start up and shut down procedures.

In addition, the business operations and activities of your tenants may have changed; for example, keeping an increased level of stock, introducing different processes or procedures, changes in shift patterns and staffing etc. Where these changes introduce new hazards or exposures into your premises, safe systems of work / working procedures, training, cleaning, disinfection and sanitisation, fire and security protection systems, amongst other risk management measures, should all be re-assessed and adapted.

If you've furloughed staff, you'll need to consider the timeframe agreed for returning to the workplace, so allow for this in planning arrangements.

If you're unable to create a safe working environment on site, those operations should be postponed until corrective measures can be put in place.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The following provides a checklist of key considerations to safely recommence your property business:

- **Observe and enforce COVID-19 workplace restrictions** in line with government regulations and guidance, including those relevant to:

  o travel to work
  o welfare provision
  o cleaning / disinfection / sanitisation
  o social distancing
 o personal protective equipment (PPE).

Your employees and others (managing agents, tenants, customers and contractors for example) may be impacted by your activities.

Where the regulations and guidance can't be met, work activities should either be revised to achieve them or stopped altogether. Guidance is available from:

  o **UK Government**, including **COVID Secure guidance** specific to Construction and other outdoor work
  o **Public Health England**
  o **Health Protection Scotland**
  o **Public Health Wales**
  o **Health and Safety Executive (HSE).**

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- **Consider how and when to communicate with tenants, managing agents, employees and contractors** around re-opening, re-starting procedures, inspections and viewings and associated expectations:
  - o Is direct contact (phone for example) appropriate, particularly where employees have specific concerns about returning? For example if they live / need regular contact with a vulnerable person
  - o Can electronic and remote platforms be used to issue initial communications before re-opening?
  - o Can appointed managing agents and / or contractors (maintenance and inspection of buildings, plant and machinery for example) meet your requirements pre and post opening?
  - o Have suitable arrangements for the management of inspections and viewings been considered, recognising the need to comply with regulations and the latest guidance provided by the UK Government and devolved institutions?

- **Communicate expectations to managing agents, tenants and appointed contractors** (utilities, fire safety, water safety, general premises management and cleaning for example), ensuring where appropriate, they've completed a review of their own risk assessments, safe systems of work / work procedures and understand your proposals and plans around re-opening / permitting occupancy. Any tenants operating in sectors where government regulation and guidance confirms that they should remain closed for the time being, must not be permitted to open.

- **Integrate employees back into their job role and activities** and assess any immediate training needs or other appropriate support. Consider the potential impacts of a significant time away from work, with some employees likely to benefit from a gradual / phased reintroduction.
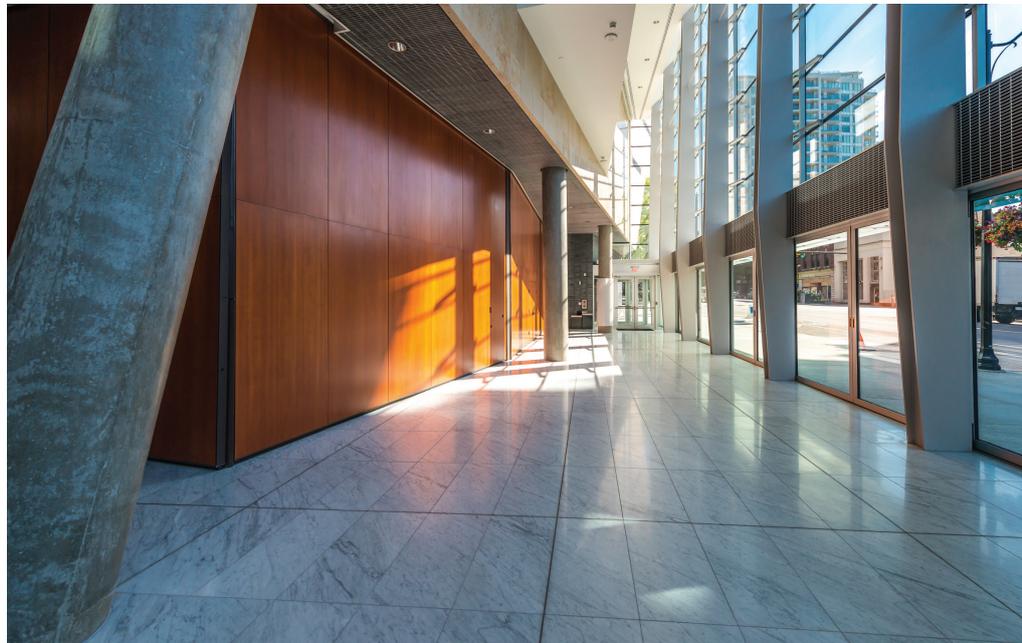
- **Address issues** including maintenance, inspection etc. and the practicalities of managing social and physical distancing challenges for example, before re-opening / re-occupancy, verifying again that tenants also have their own arrangements in place.

- **Review existing risk assessments and actions** including safe systems of work / working procedures to check they're relevant to your business' operation and that you're taking all the appropriate measures to ensure a safe environment for your employees, tenants, appointed managing agents, customers and contractors.

- **New risk assessments should be completed** if your, your managing agents', appointed contractors' or tenants' business operations and activities have changed. The results and consequent actions should be shared with employees (including any temporary and agency personnel), other tenants, visitors and contractors.

Ensure fire, security, general premises safety (including management of slip, trip and fall risks) and COVID-19 specific precautions are in your review, implementing changes and / or enhancements where necessary to maintain an appropriate level of protection.

Specific COVID-19 considerations will very much depend on the nature of occupancy. For other occupancy specific information, you may be interested in our other **trade sector guides**.

Specific considerations may include:

- o developing, implementing and communicating a strategy to maintain social / physical distancing in communal areas, especially where footfall is significant; and formally communicating associated expectations to tenants, managing agents, premises managers and contractors
- o limiting the number of entry and exit points, with separate entry and exit points if possible
- o limiting the number of persons allowed within communal areas at any time
- o providing customer facing social distancing coordinators in car park areas and near to building entry points to highlight the social distancing requirements and control the numbers entering the premises / property at any one time. In some circumstances it may be appropriate for coordinators to have a security remit and be SIA registered

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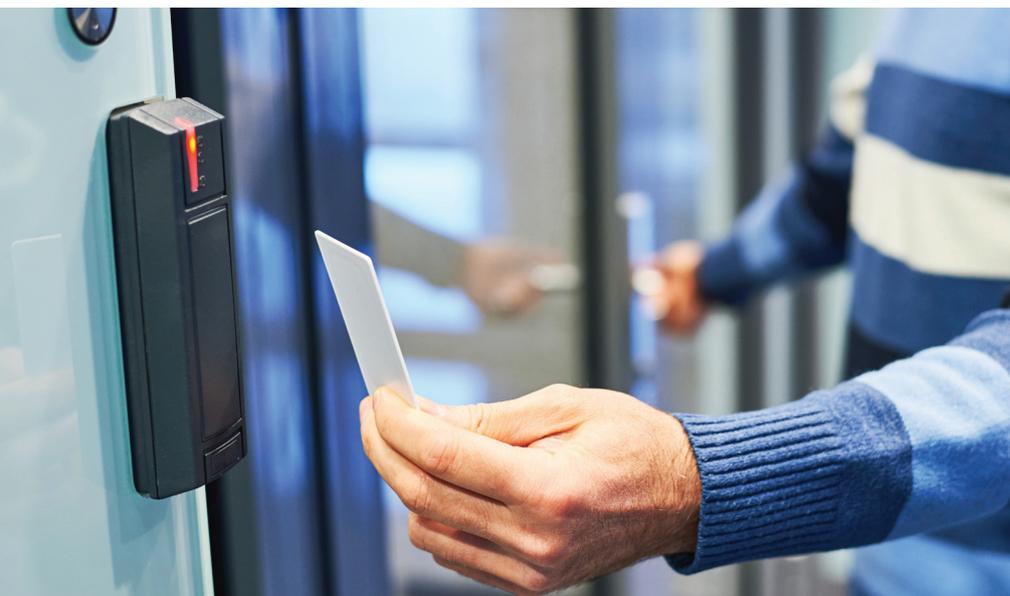
- o providing markings and signage to assist with social distancing requirements in communal areas both inside and outside of the premises, taking into account traffic management and pedestrian segregation
- o liaising with nearby / proximate premises to assist with possible shared parking
- o providing appropriately marked one-way systems in car parks and communal areas to help maintain social distancing
- o providing cleaning stations at entrance and exit points and other strategic locations within communal areas, with signage to remind customers and employees of the importance of washing hands and hygiene
- o establishing cleaning, disinfection and sanitisiation procedures for communal areas and other areas used by maintenance personnel, security personnel, contractors and cleaners for example, with a focus on regular touch points including door handles, lift buttons, keypads, stair and escalator handrails, welfare facilities (including those used by visitors, customers and employees) etc.
- o ensure appropriate arrangements for cleaning, disinfection and sanitisation of any accessibility equipment (wheelchairs for example)
- o if provided, restricting available cash points in communal areas to reduce touch points
- o limiting numbers (to one at a time) using lifts
- o limiting escalator use, considering the viability of using marking to indicate required social distancing
- o removing promotional stands, children's play equipment, vending machines and plants from communal areas, keeping communal pedestrian routes as clear as possible to assist with social distancing
- o using social media, websites and apps to inform customers of policies and procedures relevant to social distancing, hygiene etc. including updates on any of the usual services not available
- o providing adequate and suitable welfare facilities for employees, including areas for safely changing and storing clothing and PPE (where overalls and other PPE is provided, laundry arrangements and provision should be specifically reviewed)
- o removing / restricting touch points in staff areas where practical i.e. vending machines and other canteen equipment for general employee use
- o establishing procedures and safe systems of work specific to machinery interventions such as cleaning, servicing, maintenance and repair
- o IT and cyber security
- o continued support (practical and wellbeing) for any employees who continue to work from home.

Further support can be found on our **health & safety risk assessment**, **safe systems of work**, **fire risk assessment** and **cyber security** pages.

- • **Develop and carry out enhanced workplace cleaning, disinfection and sanitisation programmes**. The importance of enhanced cleaning regimes covering all customer, visitor facing and staff areas is highlighted above, with procedures to be established for pre and post re-opening cleaning, disinfection and sanitisation of communal areas. Areas for particular focus include touch points such as washing facilities, toilet flush and seats, door handles, push plates, hand rails and equipment used by employees (grounds maintenance equipment for example).

If you and / or tenants are introducing alcohol-based hand sanitisers into communal areas and areas used by employees and contractors, remember these are flammable. As well as updating your fire risk assessments (and instructing tenants to do the same), to keep your premises and people safe, ensure storage and use is clear of ignition sources (for example, electrical equipment, hot surfaces, smoking areas etc.) and ideally store within purpose designed flammable liquid cabinets, otherwise, steel cabinets. Further support can be found on our **storage and use of flammable / explosive materials** page.

- • **Undertake a thorough inspection of your site:**
  - o all buildings (interior and exterior communal areas for example)
  - o boundary fences
  - o gates and barriers
  - o utility services (including water systems and any other potential sources of legionella, power facilities, ventilation / air conditioning systems, and where provided, refrigeration plant)
  - o fall protection systems
  - o dry risers
  - o machinery / plant / equipment
  - o emergency back-up systems and safety equipment to establish and correct any unsafe or abnormal conditions, such as damage, maintenance issues, leaks, faulty safety and emergency systems, improper housekeeping or storage, signs of vandalism or theft etc.

- • **Require all tenants to complete inspections of the areas they occupy** including utility services (see above), machinery / plant / equipment, emergency back-up systems and safety equipment, again to establish and correct any unsafe or abnormal conditions etc. Our **equipment checklist** may assist you.

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The **HSE** has released specific guidance on legionella risks during the coronavirus outbreak, with advice also available on our **legionella bacteria** page.

- **Review emergency response procedures** to verify:
  o they're up-to-date
  o adequate coverage for assigned positions on all shifts, including for example first aiders and fire marshals.

Further support can be found on our **emergency procedures** page.

- **Allow sufficient time in your planning** to recommission previously shutdown machinery / plant and processes in line with all standard operating procedures (SOPs) and manufacturers' guidelines.

- **Complete and reinstate any inspection, testing and maintenance procedures** including those of a statutory nature that may have lapsed since the shutdown, incorporating utility services, machinery / plant (for example passenger lifts and escalators), emergency systems etc. Our **equipment checklist** may assist you, in addition to external guidance such as the **HSE**.

- **Appoint competent persons** to verify all protection / detection systems including fire sprinkler / suppression systems, fire pumps, water supplies, fire alarm systems, intruder alarm systems, CCTV, access control, barriers, gates etc., are in service and functioning correctly.

- **Ensure work competence and capability of employees** for the activities to be carried out checking all:
  o possess the necessary and appropriate skills
  o have received appropriate information, instruction and training, and hold the correct and up-to-date certificates and licenses, where required.

Additional training programmes and / or certification, instruction, information and supervision may be required where there is an insufficient number of competent personnel with regard to your return-to-work-policy (where in place). This can help provide structure and a framework to ensure your personnel are 'fit for work' and consider issues such as mental health, wellbeing and physical fitness.

In reviewing the training arrangements and competency requirements, specific consideration should be given to the following:

- **Availability and responsibilities of key personnel**
  o senior managers
  o Human Resources, Facilities Management and Health, Safety & Environmental personnel
  o premises managers
  o maintenance personnel
  o first aiders
  o fire marshals
  o cleaning personnel (internal and externally appointed contractors)
  o security personnel.

- **Formal induction / re-induction**
  o specific expectations and controls relating to COVID-19 and any amendment to rules
  o consider the specific requirements of any vulnerable workers (young persons, new and expectant mothers, any groups identified as being at risk of severe illness as a result of COVID-19).

- **Other training needs**
  o Conflict resolution / management training to address potential customer challenges in implementing COVID-19 secure measures.
  o Familiarisation (site and plant for example) to be specifically considered, with returning furloughed employees and operatives potentially not having operated plant or been in a working environment for a significant period of time.

- **Training delivery**
  o Requirements around social and physical distancing for example, are likely to impact the practicalities of training delivery, including induction and toolbox talks. This should be considered as part of the risk assessment process, including available facilities, numbers that can be safely accommodated, duration, potential barriers to communication etc.

Further support can be found on our **training** page.

- **Review your business continuity plan** including:
  o supply chain resilience (stock, machinery and equipment parts and components and IT systems of software for example)
  o implementation and mitigation measures, to reflect any changes to your business operation and lessons learned from the temporary shutdown.

Visit our **business continuity** page for further support.

Further information and support is available on our **risk management portal** and **Coronavirus resource hub**.

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