

Coronavirus Covid-19; Engineers working on customer sites

FS04

Logistics, manufacturing and construction businesses have all been identified by the Government as important sectors vital to the economy during this national emergency. It is essential they continue to operate as near normal, whilst following social distancing guidelines.

Government policy is clear; all supply chains – not just those delivering food and medical supplies – need to continue with their operations. Retail businesses supplying food and medicines have been identified as critical, although other retail outlets, along with hotels and restaurants are required to close.

To maintain safe operation of these businesses, it is essential that the servicing, maintenance, inspection and Thorough Examination of Material Handling Equipment (MHE) continues. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has confirmed that the legal obligation to ensure equipment is safe remains fully in force. HSE has also stipulated that social distancing in the workplace must be maintained and that it will take enforcement action to ensure this where necessary.

The UK Government has further confirmed that travel to work sites necessary to maintain the safe operation of such equipment should be considered as 'essential travel' in the context of current restrictions

Where sites are closed and access to MHE for service, maintenance and Thorough Examination is not possible, equipment should be removed from service and not re-activated until all outstanding activities have been completed (see BITA Fact Sheet FS02 – **Standing down MHE**).

Safe Working Practices

Clearly, it is necessary to make some changes to working practices for engineers and technicians visiting customer sites to ensure they can adhere to social distancing recommendations of at least 2 metres (6ft 6ins) in order to minimise the risk of infection and complete their work safely.

Sites should

- Provide a method for entering and leaving sites which complies with social distancing and which minimises the risk of contamination through shared contact surfaces, e.g. touch screens or pens.
- Ensure all visitors to the site have access to sanitary facilities whenever required.
- Keep servicing, inspection and Thorough Examination of equipment up to date – and where this cannot be done because the whole site is closed, they must ensure that use of equipment with a lapsed regime is effectively prevented until such time as all outstanding requirements under both LOLER and PUWER are brought up to date;
- Identify a suitable safe and segregated working area for the engineer; and
- Agree a plan on the disposal of waste, for instance additional waste created through cleaning down equipment prior to commencement of work.

Sites should not:

- Expose visiting engineers to potential sources of infection, for instance by expecting them to decontaminate equipment which has been operated by someone with suspected COVID-19.

Visiting engineers should:

- Check for symptoms of COVID-19 before setting off to work. Self-isolate if they are suffering from a fever, a new persistent dry cough or one of the other symptoms listed by HM Government.
- Not go into work if anyone in their household is self-isolating.
- Notify the site of their anticipated arrival time and scope of work and agree safe working practices. Note: this may be done via the engineer's service desk rather than directly with the site.
- Travel to site independently whilst maintaining social distancing.
- Ensure that site rules are followed, and that the site is aware of their arrival and expected departure times, and the status of work activities, especially where outstanding or incomplete.
- Wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before commencing work and again upon completion
- Where possible, use signage, cones and tape to segregate the working area
- Wear single use disposable gloves where practical.
- Wipe down MHE before commencing work (see BITA Fact Sheet **FS03 – Safe cleaning practices for MHE & plant**)
- Consider infection risk in their pre-work Risk Assessment, for example social distancing and contact surfaces.
- Discuss any concerns over social distancing with their site contact or line manager before commencing/continuing with work activities.
- Remove or dispose of waste appropriately.

Visiting engineers should not:

- Commence/continue any work activity which cannot be completed safely.
- Deviate from pre-existing Risk Assessments and Method Statements without the express approval of their line manager.

Social Distancing

Some tasks cannot be completed by a single engineer working alone, in these circumstances a specific risk assessment and method statement should be produced. This should:

- Consider whether the activity is essential, or whether it could be postponed.
- Consider alternative working methods to enable the activity to be safely completed by a single person.
- Identify and implement mitigating actions to reduce the risk of virus transmission.

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 - The World Health Organisation (WHO) advises that goggles and N95 or FFP2 face masks provide protection against virus transmission. However, supplies of this type of PPE are very limited and **priority should be given to front line healthcare workers.**
 - To be effective, face masks must be worn correctly, changed frequently, removed properly, disposed of safely and used in combination with good universal hygiene behaviour.
 - Where face masks are worn, a 'fit test' should be performed.
 - Protection from 'surgical mask' type face coverings is unproven, and these should not be relied upon.
- Engineers should maintain a 2 metre (6ft 6ins) distance between themselves and another person as much as possible.
- Do not carry out tasks that breach social distancing (2 m) without first discussing this with your line manager.
- UK Government advice is that where the work is essential and 2 m distance to co-workers cannot be maintained, then you should work side by side, or facing away from each other, rather than face to face, in so far as is possible. Working in this manner should be minimised because the protection provided is likely to be reduced.
- Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before starting the activity and again upon completion.