



BUSINESS FIRE SAFETY DURING CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

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FIRE RISK ASSESSMENTS

It is important that, as changes are naturally made to control the spread of Covid-19, they are also considered in the context of your premises fire safety risk assessment to help manage and mitigate the risk of fire as much as possible. Significant changes should be identified and recorded.

Consider asking some simple questions:

Risk Reduction:

Have you taken all reasonable measures to reduce the risk of fire? E.g. isolating all non-essential equipment and machinery

Fire alarm systems:

Is your fire alarm system in a good working order? – ensure it remains tested regularly to ensure this.

Interim measures:

If you have had to implement some interim measures do all your staff know and understand why and what they are?

New or emerging risk:

Has risk changed?

Have things been put in place as a response to the situation that have, on reflection, increased fire risk? (eg; Introduction of oxygen use/storage)

Vulnerable people:

Are the most vulnerable receiving support?

Are PEEPS being conducted and reviewed to assess individual needs/ changes in their vulnerability? – who is caring for the vulnerable and can they still maintain it?

During this period, we would advise you to review your fire risk assessment regularly.

EVACUATION PLAN

All staff, residents and visitors must be familiar with the evacuation plan (including all temporary and bank staff).

Maintaining minimum staffing levels to undertake the evacuation plan is very important.

Where appropriate, PEEPS must continue to be conducted and reviewed.

Are your emergency escape routes clear and usable?

Do you share an emergency escape route with a neighbouring building, are they open for business, can you still use this emergency route?

Have you factored in social distancing into your emergency evacuation point?

Are there any changes to firefighting access? Do you need to inform your local fire crew?

FIRE ALARM ACTUATION AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

You may wish to consider adopting a version of the following process to reduce disruption, maintain fire safety and minimise the need for external persons (in this case firefighters) to enter your premises at a time when you may be 'shielding' residents from preventable exposure to potential Covid-19 transmission.

If the fire alarm activates, commence your normal emergency procedures.

Suitably trained staff should investigate the source of the alarm seeking to establish if it is a fire or a false alarm.

If, at any point during the investigation a fire is discovered or there is a smell of burning or smoke that cannot be accounted for, dial 999 and ask for the fire service immediately – stating that an evacuation is in progress.

If, following the investigation, you are certain that there is no fire, and no suspicion of a fire, then the emergency procedures can be cancelled. Under these circumstances, do not call the fire service.

The fire alarm system should be re-set by a competent member of staff and the fire alarm logbook updated with a record of the event

To prevent any unnecessary disruption, please ensure that any known problems causing false fire alarms are immediately corrected, so that there is a high degree of confidence that fire alarms that do occur are genuine.

FIRE PROTECTION SYSTEMS (e.g. fire alarm, emergency lighting, smoke control etc)

Is your fire alarm system, emergency lighting system, smoke control system etc. in a good working order?

It is important that your fire protection systems (where fitted or installed) are maintained in good working condition at all times through the continuation of your normal testing regimes.

If your system/s are due to be maintained by a qualified engineer, but you want to limit the number of visitors to your premises at this time, you may decide to delay the attendance of the engineer.

If you take this action you must record it as a significant finding in the fire risk assessment and highlight the importance of the regular tests you then undertake to ensure the system/s remain fully functional

There may still be occasions when engineers / contractors have to attend your premises to maintain essential fire safety systems. You should plan ahead for this eventuality within your Business Continuity arrangements.

If you are uncertain whether maintenance schedules can safely be extended for the system/s in your premises you should contact a qualified fire safety system engineer.

FIRE DOORS

Buildings are fitted with self-closing fire doors to prevent smoke and fire from spreading from one compartment to another and to protect escape routes.

Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service strongly advises against the practice of wedging fire doors and asks responsible persons to consider other control measures.

BUILDINGS NOT IN USE

If your building is temporarily closed there are some simple measures to safeguard against both accidental and deliberate fires:

- Isolate utilities and machinery that are not required – but ensure your security/fire alarms are still operative.
- Close all fire doors.
- Don't store combustible materials against the building and consider other measures to prevent arson
- Where possible ask your local community to help keep an eye on your premises.

BLOCKS OF FLATS, HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION AND STUDENT ACCOMMODATION

Fire safety within dwellings is an extremely important issue, especially in mixed use premises and where unrelated occupiers, who live independently from one another, share common areas of the same building.

Key considerations should be:

- Ensure that safety systems, including your fire alarm and smoke control systems are in a good working, are being tested appropriately and are maintained well;
- Ensure that common areas and means of escape routes are clear from combustible items;

- Ensure refuse compounds and other storage areas are not overflowing;
- Ensure that refuse is not stored immediately next to buildings – minimum distance of 6m should be maintained where possible;
- Ensure that all occupiers are familiar with the building's evacuation strategy;
- Ensure that all fire safety features are maintained, i.e. fire doors are closed and not wedged open;
- Any change of strategy needs constant review and robust management.

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK RELATED GUIDANCE DOCUMENTS

<https://www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk/COVID-19/Protection>

GET IN TOUCH

Due to the ongoing coronavirus outbreak Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service has implemented its business continuity planning arrangements. Many staff are now working remotely but will be picking up emails.

If you wish to raise a concern or raise a question with our Fire Safety Protection team you can email info@hwfire.org.uk, or call 0800 0321155