
Issued on behalf of the
SEC Group Northern Ireland

2 April 2020



Work to be carried out in commercial properties

OPERATING PROCEDURES DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Introduction

The Specialist Engineering (SEC) Group in Northern Ireland brings together the following trade and professional bodies that represent a broad range of interests of engineering specialists working in the construction sector across the UK:

- SNIPEF
- ECA
- BESA
- BCSA
- SELECT
- Scaffolding Association
- LEIA

The Group provides a forum for these bodies to discuss, at a strategic level, issues of common interest and of industry-wide significance

What we are doing

Earlier this week, we wrote [to the First and Deputy First Minister seeking clarity on existing public sector contracts and contractual position regarding delays](#), payment acceleration down the supply chain, release of cash retentions on historical contracts, support for wages, open dialogue on insurance cover and for sites to be kept open for as long as it was safe to do so.

Since the Prime Minister's announcement on Monday evening the UK is in "lock-down" and our position regarding construction site closures has changed. As a result a further communication has been sent to the Executive Office supporting the closure of sites except for essential services.

What work should the construction industry in Northern Ireland undertake?

On 24 March 2020, the First Minister for Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, said “her advice was that non-essential building sites should close”. There has been much discussion on this matter since then with the Construction Employers Federation advising all their members to close construction sites, and the FMB, we understand are following this advice for their members.

We welcome the recent statement by **Connor Murphy, Finance Minister** <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/news/construction-companies-supporting-essential-works-must-comply-pha-guidelines-murphy> that provides further clarity and SEC Group (NI) has agreed to issue the following guidance to businesses operating in Northern Ireland.

1. We recommend that businesses follow advice from the Finance Minister for Northern Ireland; in accordance to these, our guidance is that work should only be undertaken on Construction sites in the case of Essential Services i.e. hospitals, transport, water and sewage infrastructure.
2. We recommend that only emergency repair and maintenance work essential to safety* is undertaken until notified otherwise by the Northern Ireland Executive.
3. We recommend that any other construction work should be suspended in the meantime.

** Your own trade association will provide further examples and guidance, but businesses should use their own judgement over what constitutes an “emergency”.*

We understand that the situation is subject to constant review and this guidance will be updated accordingly. We are also asking the Executive to give us a more specific definition of ‘essential’ works.

Guidance

The following guidance has been introduced to offer some form of clarity to the industry as we all work in the most unusual of times. Every business must make their own judgements on the work they will do but they should understand the advice which the Northern Ireland Assembly and UK Government has issued over the steps to be taken to minimise the spread of Coronavirus.

We have produced 2 guides, one for those working in domestic properties (homes) and the other for those who may work in commercial premises e.g. nursing homes, medical centres, etc. Please note these premises may issue their own advice and this must be taken into account as well.

It is not “business as usual” for our industry and we must all play our part to protect our staff, our customers and the wider population from the spread of this terrible virus.

This advice is subject to change without notice depending on decisions taken by the Northern Ireland Assembly and UK Government and updated information will be issued as required.

For more information or guidance please keep visiting your trade or professional bodies website.

Work carried out in commercial premises

It will be necessary to undertake some work in commercial properties especially in areas around emergency repair and maintenance work.

When such work is required, businesses should speak with the relevant person and ensure that they share any specific site guidance about the work to be undertaken and especially the health and safety considerations for those undertaking the work and those who may be occupying the premises.

Tradespeople carrying out emergency repairs and maintenance, can continue, to carry out work, provided that the tradesperson is well and has no symptoms.

It is important to ensure that Government guidelines, including maintaining a 2 metre distance from any household occupants, are followed to ensure everyone's safety:



www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public

In those premises where individuals may be isolating or where an individual is being shielded, e.g nursing homes etc. work should only be carried out **to remedy a direct risk to the safety of the household, such as emergency plumbing, heating or electrical repairs**, and where the tradesperson is willing to do so. In such cases, Public Health England can provide advice to tradespeople and households.

No work should be carried out by a tradesperson who has coronavirus symptoms, however mild.

We have prepared a letter which you should send to your client before you commence work explaining how they and your operative will be protected. A copy is available on our homepage called "letter to commercial customers."

Key considerations

- When discussing a visit to a site or premises, ask if any residents or staff in a workplace are self-isolating, displaying any symptoms of COVID19, and/or have received a positive diagnosis.
- Where the occupants are not self-isolating, displaying any symptoms, and have not been diagnosed with COVID-19, trades may attend for emergency situations, whilst exercising general best practise in line with the latest Government guidance for the public:



www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public

- Government guidance is continually evolving, but be especially vigilant of undertaking work for those persons currently identified as most at risk, such as the over-70's, and/or with underlying health issues
- As well as protecting yourself, and your customers, you should also consider the welfare of your operatives and colleagues.

Practical steps to take when working in the field

- On the day of the work, call ahead to your customer to ask if they or anyone in the premises or on the site have signs of the virus, have been diagnosed, or are self-isolating, and to check that they are comfortable with your visit to take place.
- Explain to your customers what you will be doing, and why, and that you will need to maintain a safe distance from them (2m or 6 steps away is current Government advice), including when waiting for the customer to provide access.
- Do not shake hands with the customer or anyone else in the building.
- Ask if all the occupants can stay in another room, away from the work area(s) whilst the work proceeds. With permission ventilate the work area where appropriate, e.g. by opening a window.
- Wash your hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds, at the start of the job and after (also during the work). It is recommended that you carry your own hand-towel with your equipment. Please ensure that you wash/replace hand-towel with your equipment at end of each day/shift.
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Wear suitable work gloves.
- If you or your operative feels unsafe or at risk at any point, undertake a personal risk assessment and leave the premises if necessary. You can re-plan for a future date if appropriate, after ensuring everything is made safe.
- If a customer/engineer signature is usually required by the type of work you undertake, consider how it may be avoided, or if possible, send an electronic copy at a later date.

Please note: Use and/or sharing of pens, tablets or mobile phones may pose a risk of contamination/infection.

What to do before starting work and after work is completed

- Wipe down any operational rubber gloves, tools and instruments before and after any work.
- Remove and place into a plastic bag any wipes, disposable gloves and overalls used, whilst trying not to cross-contaminate onto existing clothes or persons.
- Do not touch your face.
- Ensure you then clean/wash your hands, and where possible/appropriate any reusable PPE (e.g. safety glasses), using soap and water, or use suitable hand sanitizer on hands before moving to your next job.
- At the end of each day and following the appropriate local waste regulations dispose of any bagged waste in line with any existing business process and/or Government guidance.

Further Information

Please note, this document has been prepared to offer some form of guidance and it is not exhaustive. It is vital that every job, and potential risk, is judged on its own merits and that the key considerations around health and welfare are the primary concerns for any work you undertake.

Further advice and information will be available from your trade or professional body.

For further details contact:



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