



S₂ Partnership Ltd
Intelligent Risk Management

Reoccupation of Buildings that have been Temporarily Vacant: Fire Safety & Water Hygiene June 2020

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As businesses start preparing their work spaces for reoccupation, following periods of reduced occupancy within their buildings and offices, there are several key points relating to fire safety and water hygiene which may require consideration.

The contents of this advice note relate specifically to the reoccupation of buildings which have been temporarily vacant, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This advice note is not guidance on how to comply with the law. The UK Government's direct advice takes primacy over this guidance and is liable to change over time.

Fire Safety

Fire Risk Assessment

On reoccupation of buildings and offices, following the easing of the lockdown restrictions, it is recommended that Fire Risk Assessments are examined and then reviewed, where it is necessary to do so. This is to ensure that companies take into account any changes to their business operations, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact this may have on their preventative and protective fire safety measures. The review should consider the following:

- staffing levels and availability to carry out an evacuation where required (including suitable numbers of fire wardens or marshals and their training);
- disabled people and any persons who may require assistance in an emergency;
- lone workers;
- any changes in working practices;
- stock levels;
- testing and maintenance regimes;
- staff training, including fire wardens or fire marshals;
- the emergency evacuation plan; and
- firefighter access and facilities.

this list is not exhaustive and other measures may need to also be considered.

Emergency Evacuation Plan

The emergency evacuation plan for the premises may need to be reviewed. This is to ensure that it aligns with your reviewed Fire Risk Assessment and current staffing levels for the building. Where businesses have implemented one-way systems to enable social distancing, the impact this may have on the Emergency Evacuation Plan needs to be assessed, as does the use of lifts to evacuate staff, visitors and residents who cannot make use of the stairways.

It is recommended that occupiers and landlords (or their representatives) work together to ensure both parties are aware of any amendments made in emergency procedures.



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Other Fire Safety Matters to Consider:

- Check for any build up of combustibles whilst the building has been closed.
- Consider that alcohol-based hand sanitizer is combustible, keep away from heat, smoking materials, etc.
- Inspect all fire escape routes and check that little-used fire exit doors open easily. If you share an escape route with another business, remember that those may not be open and alternative arrangements may be required.
- Where businesses were closed during the lockdown period, fire safety systems may not have been subject to recent testing and maintenance. Before returning to work, all these systems, i.e. fire alarms, sprinklers and fire extinguishers, etc. should be tested/checked.
- If your fire alarm is linked to an Alarm Receiving Centre/Remote Monitoring Service, this connection should be tested to ensure a correct response in case of fire.
- If fire doors are required to be held open to reduce touch points, a correct device that allows the door to close on activation of the alarm must be fitted. Wedges must not be used.
- Where escape routes have been altered to implement social distancing and other safety measures within your building, this needs to be communicated to all personnel. Amend fire notices where required.
- Your current assembly point needs to be large enough to reflect HM Government advice on social distancing. If the assembly point is relocated, then this should be communicated to all staff. If businesses implement a dispersal (or scatter) approach to evacuation once out of the building, arrangements may need amending to account for the safe evacuation of personnel.
- Where plans for evacuation are contained within Premises Information Boxes then you should ensure that these are current with the situation and updated as they are reviewed.



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Water Hygiene

When domestic hot and cold water systems are not used for a prolonged period of time and are not regularly flushed through, this can lead to an increased likelihood of the growth of legionella bacteria and other microorganisms within the water systems, due to water stagnation and unsatisfactory water temperatures. This, in turn, can present an increased risk of Legionnaires' disease to users of the systems and may also result in the development of difficult to remove biofilms, which can further increase the likelihood of the presence of legionella and other microorganisms within the water systems.

It is recommended in order to combat this, that weekly flushing of all domestic water systems outlets in vacant properties is completed and recorded.

Buildings that have remained empty with static water systems, or those that have been subject to flushing that does not represent normal usage, require a recommissioning of the water system, prior to re-opening. The extent of works will vary, depending on the level of risk based on their risk assessment.

Procedures Prior to Reoccupation

In general, S₂ Partnership would recommend that the following procedures are undertaken, prior to reoccupation:

- For buildings which have been subject to routine flushing that represents normal usage, validation sampling is recommended to confirm that the flushing has been effective.
- For low-risk water systems, weekly flushing alone may be sufficient, but validation sampling is also recommended to confirm that the flushing has been effective.
- For more complex water systems and/or those with a history of positive legionella samples, it is recommended that a 'cleansing flush' of the system is completed, along with validation sampling to confirm that this has been effective.



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If the validation sampling indicates the presence of legionella bacteria within the building's water systems, it is further recommended that a full clean and disinfection is carried out, with further validation sampling completed post-cleaning and disinfection to confirm that this has been effective. If showers are present, these are to be taken out of use, but still flushed with the shower heads removed to promote water turnover until validation sampling confirms that any measures, such as cleaning and disinfection, have been effective in eradicating legionella bacteria from the water systems. Flushing of showers in a way that does not release aerosols can be achieved by submerging the shower head in a bucket filled with water.

Cleansing Flush

Cleansing flushing is different from normal 'hygiene flushing' and is designed to remove debris or organic matter from the system. During this process all valves, including float-operated or other restrictive valves, should be operated in the fully open position, so any particulate matter can be flushed from the supply pipe and prevent fouling of the valves.

Disinfection

This must be completed when the systems are not in use and it must be by a competent person. Evidence of their competency must be confirmed, so that the knowledge and experience of the operatives is known to be satisfactory for undertaking the proposed work. All work carried out must be completed in accordance with the HSE's ACoP L8 / HSG274 Part 2.

Cooling Towers and Evaporative Condensers

Cooling towers and evaporative condensers present a much higher risk for the growth and proliferation of legionella bacteria than domestic hot and cold water systems. Cooling Towers and Evaporative Condensers produce airborne droplets that can spread over a wide area, if they are inadequately maintained, and can cause outbreaks of Legionnaires' disease. As such, these systems need to be carefully managed.

S₂ Partnership would recommend taking specialist advice if you have any of these systems within your demise, as the systems must continue to be maintained in accordance with the HSE's ACoP L8 / HSG274 Part 1 or safely shut down.



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