



Considerations for Technicians/Tradesmen when Working in Occupied Buildings

**Helpful guidance for PCA members & Technicians
to work safely during COVID-19**

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1. POSSIBLE CONSIDERATIONS FOR THOSE UNDERTAKING PROPERTY CARE OPERATIONS IN OCCUPIED BUILDINGS

It is only acceptable to undertake preservation and property care related work on occupied buildings, homes, and commercial premises, where the planned activities can be carried out safely with a minimum possible risk of spreading the COVID-19 virus.

The information below sets out what the PCA considers useful considerations that can be read alongside Government advice aimed at preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

As many property care related activities create a range of hazards including dust, noise and exposure to irritant chemicals, work will usually be undertaken in unoccupied properties or areas of the property that have been cleared of furniture and floor coverings, as well as occupants. Working in a way that isolates occupants from work activities has many occupational safety advantages that includes preventing the transmission of COVID-19.

It is understood however that operations such as the installation of fans and the servicing of ventilation systems, localised timber floor repairs, some minor damp control works and the repair and maintenance of sump pumps, may be requested whilst people are occupying the building.

This guidance is designed to help employers create systems of work that protect both workers and the occupants of the property from the transmission of COVID-19. In addition to the considerations relevant to COVID-19 considered here, it is essential that a risk assessment has been undertaken to highlight all the more normal operational hazards and risks associated with the intended work.

Much of the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that is required to prevent the spread of COVID-19 will be in daily use by the professional tradespeople, who routinely visit dusty roofs and unoccupied voids where inhalation or contact contamination hazards are regularly encountered.

Disposable gloves, rigger type gloves, coveralls, good quality respiratory protection (that has been face fit tested to the individual employee), as well as eye protection, safety boots and safety helmets should be standard equipment for the specialist tradespeople and site workers. This equipment should be available at all times and used when appropriate.

Above all, it is imperative that the Government guidance regarding COVID-19 is followed (see links below). Any information provided here is subservient to information and guidance issued by the UK Government or other regulatory authorities such as the Health and Safety Executive:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5eb967e286650c2791ec7100/working-safely-during-covid-19-other-peoples-homes-110520.pdf>

https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/assets/docs/working-safely-guide.pdf?utm_source=govdelivery&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=coronavirus&utm_term=working-safely-4&utm_content=stakeholder-14-may-20

2. FOR THE WORKER

All workers must be provided with appropriate training and must be deemed competent to carry out work within occupied buildings safely. Workers should be fully aware of the need to comply with the safe operating processes that have resulted from a suitable and sufficient risk assessment. Workers and staff should be consulted as part of the risk assessment process.

Workers and site visitors must be equipped with the appropriate type and quantity of personal protective equipment. This should be put on before entering the occupied building and must not be removed until they leave site, and the worker is outside the property.

The equipment that should be worn before entering the occupied property will include disposable gloves, face covering and a coverall. Additional PPE may be required if other hazards become apparent during the survey.

Where occupants are in the building, workers must observe the 2-metre distancing rule at all times. The workers should never ask for, or accept, refreshments.

At the commencement of operations, a work area should be established and agreed with the occupant and marked. This should also include provision for accessing the work areas in away that ensures the occupants are not encountered, as workers enter and leave the work area.

Occupants should be asked not to enter the work area for the duration of the onsite operations, this may be minutes, hours, or days. A work area may be defined by a room, area within the house, or the entire building and should be established to allow operations to be undertaken safely while observing the 2-metre social distancing rule.

Gloves must be worn at all times when handling ladders, handles and doors etc. If disposable gloves are ripped or damaged during the survey, these must be removed safely, hands should be washed, and new gloves should be put on as soon as possible.

After any work session and on leaving the work area, disposable gloves should be removed in accordance with best practice to avoid direct skin contact. Any non-reusable PPE can be safely removed and stored safely for disposal.

No worker should work if they are ill, have tested positive for COVID-19 or are displaying any symptoms, no matter how slight.

Government advice relating to transport should be observed.

The worker should avoid bringing any equipment into the occupied building that will not be needed. Tools and equipment that are used within the property should be cleaned using disinfectant spray or wipes before being taken back to the store or going to the next job. If possible, tools and equipment should not be shared between vans, teams, or sites.

Handwashing facilities must be available to workers at all times and workers must ensure the Government's guidance on regular hand washing is observed throughout the working day.

If disposable coveralls are used these should be worn once and disposed of after each work session. Where cloth coveralls are used, a clean set should be available if the first become dirty or potentially contaminated. These can be washed for reuse.

Guidance on establishing rules for workers getting to site, working in teams, hygiene and welfare are set out in the Construction Leadership Council's document, as follows:

<https://www.constructionleadershipcouncil.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Site-Operating-Procedures-Version-4.pdf>

3. RULES FOR THE OCCUPANT

Before workers attend the property, the residents must be made aware of a list of preconditions that must be met and agreed to before the survey takes place. These must be observed throughout the duration of any work.

Instruction, agreements, conditions, and any terms of engagement should be communicated to the occupant and the party instructing the work (if different). This correspondence should be retained by the company. If the occupant fails to acknowledge their responsibilities, or is unable or unwilling to observe their obligations, workers should not attend and the work should not take place.

The residents or occupants must be prepared to strictly observe the Government's guidance on social distancing and be prepared to stay out of the designated work area.

For the duration of the work, the occupants must either leave the building or confine themselves to areas outside the agreed work area, and at all times, strictly observe the 2-metre social distancing rule.

The occupants should be asked to move all soft furnishings, personal effects, and anything that may obstruct or impede the progress of the proposed work. Clearing the workspace of items will not only facilitate efficient working and reduce the likelihood of accidental damage, it will also prevent workers coming into contact with possessions and items that could be contaminated with COVID-19.

The occupant must help establish access routes that allow workers to enter and leave the work area without encountering the occupants.

If the investigation requires any opening up to determine the cause or extent of a defect, this should be done by the occupant before the surveyor attends site. If this is not possible and opening up has to be

performed by the surveyor or other trades, then a separate risk assessment may be necessary to determine if and how these operations can be performed safely.

Before attending the property, the person responsible for health and safety management at the contracting company should contact the occupant by email or telephone and, ensure they are fully aware of all operational requirements in preparation for the proposed property care work.

In line with Government advice, work should not take place if the building is occupied by people who are 75 years old or older (regardless of medical conditions) or under 70 but have an underlying health condition. Similarly, if occupants are ill, have tested positive for COVID-19 or have recently displayed symptoms regardless how slight, any non-urgent visits should be delayed.

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