

COVID-19 AND WASTE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

(MRFs, Transport and CA sites)

The information contained in this document is time sensitive. It was first produced on 2 April 2020. Subsequent Government advice may change.

You should first always follow the latest Government advice (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>).

Government activity on COVID-19 is being led by the Department of Health and Social Care and PHE in conjunction with the devolved administrations.

This document takes account of advice published on the HSENI website:

(<https://www.hseni.gov.uk>)

Please note that the intent of this document is to provide basic waste industry related advice on COVID-19 it is not a comprehensive 'one-stop-shop' for advice on COVID-19. You should also read and understand the freely available Government advice (such as at the above web addresses) and use this in conjunction with this document.

Why is COVID-19 a problem in the waste and recycling industry?

COVID-19 is a virus. It is an opportunistic pathogen because it is apparently easily spread from human to human. Currently it is thought one person may infect up to three others, even when asymptomatic (i.e. not showing any symptoms).

COVID-19 is transmitted by inhalation or ingestion in the same way that normal seasonal flu is transmitted. Normal seasonal flu is spread by three main routes. It is likely that COVID-19 is spread similarly:

- **Contact:** By hand to face/mouth/nose/eye contact after touching a person, surface, or object contaminated with respiratory droplets;
- **Droplet:** By coughing and sneezing and aerosol droplets being inhaled etc.;
- **Airborne:** Fine droplets may stay in the air longer and spread the infection without close contact.

This means the main ways it is transmitted is because a person has it on their hands and the pathogen is ingested, absorbed via mucous membranes or they inhale aerosol droplets emitted by an infected person. The virus remains active for up to 72 hours on hard surfaces and other materials such as cardboard.

To limit the spread of the disease it is important that individuals self-isolate if they, or their family, have symptoms, or if they are immunocompromised or similar. This could result in significant absence from work and large organisations should prepare for up to **20%** of their workforce being unable to work, although this may not be all at the same time. Smaller organisations should prepare for **30%** absence as staff may be affected disproportionately. Larger organisations should be aware that they may have several smaller sites which could also be disproportionately affected.

Actions to limit the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.

General precautions

The **MOST** important control for preventing the spread of any virus is good hygiene. This cannot be over-emphasised – there has been much debate in the media and elsewhere on the use of face masks and similar, but the most important way of preventing spread is good hygiene.

Remember, preventing the spread of germs is the single most effective way to slow the spread of diseases such as COVID-19. You should always:

- Use tissues to cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze (**CATCH IT**);
- Place used tissues in a bin as soon as possible (**BIN IT**);
- Ensure everyone washes their hands regularly with soap and water (**KILL IT**);
- Clean surfaces regularly to get rid of germs (**KILL IT**).

For the above to be effective, employees need to have tissues available either provided by themselves or by their employer and, if they are not site based, bags to dispose of used tissues.

HSENI has provided the following advice to businesses:

- Encourage their employees to work at home, wherever possible;
- Have systems in place to ensure that if someone becomes unwell in the workplace with a new, continuous cough and/or a high temperature, they should be sent home and advised to follow the advice to stay at home;
- Employees should be reminded to wash their hands regularly throughout the day for at least 20 seconds on each occasion, and to sneeze into tissues and dispose of the tissues promptly – Catch it, Bin it, Kill it. (suitable washing facilities with soap, hot and cold water or warm water or hand sanitisers must be provided);
- Frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, using standard cleaning products.

Specific application to MRFs, Transport and CA sites.

In addition to the above, the use of 'Social Distancing' is also included in Government advice. This means keeping at least 2 metres (>6 feet) away from other people. This may pose issues for waste management activities – see further advice given below. Please note that social distancing assumes no respiratory protection is in use.

Companies should also review their risk assessments and take account of measures in the risk assessment, to follow general advice regarding distancing and ensure that it is observed between employees both at their workstations and in other areas of their premises.

Advice can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people>

HSENI have also provided a template risk assessment which can be found at:

<https://www.hseni.gov.uk/news/example-risk-assessment-covid-19-workplaces>

Where this social distancing cannot be achieved within the normal working environment additional means of protection must be considered.

For example:

- Reduce number of workers on site at any one time;
- Relocating workers to other tasks to minimise employees within a particular area;
- Redesigning processes to allow for social distancing;
- Put in place temporary barriers between staff within vehicles or on picking lines (Introducing temporary barriers does not negate the need to reduce numbers of staff on picking lines or similar tasks);
- Utilise technology such as teleconferencing instead of face to face meetings;
- Adjust workflow or production line speeds.

Any activities that requires employees to work in close proximity to each other (i.e. less than 2 meters) must be risk assessed.

Every attempt must be made to ensure 2 metres separation is maintained. Should this not be possible then the process must be reassessed to include any additional measures and PPE that would be required.

PPE should include face masks and gloves with the addition of other items such as face visor, aprons, safety glasses etc. to ensure employee safety.

This work must be the exception and social distancing reintroduced at the earliest opportunity following the activity. Disposable PPE must be disposed of accordingly and other items of PPE cleaned appropriately after use.

Good personal hygiene must be maintained at all times.

It is expected that social distancing of at least 2 meters be recognised by organisations as one of the main control measures against the spread of COVID-19.

Personal Protective Equipment

Employers may be currently experiencing significant problems obtaining personal protective equipment (PPE).

Public Health guidance on the use of PPE (personal protective equipment) relates to health care settings. In all other settings employers should continue to provide PPE as required by their risk assessments. In all other cases individuals are asked to observe social distancing measures and practise good hand hygiene behaviours.

Welfare facilities and offices on sites

- Consideration should be given to staggering rest breaks so that people number in rest areas are limited. For example, only 1 person per table;
- Where capacity is reached the facility should operate a “one in, one out” policy. Staff and supervisors should be responsible for monitoring and controlling this;
- Measures should be introduced to avoid people meeting or congregating at entrances;
- Ensure that rest areas are thoroughly wiped down and cleansed after rest breaks and other uses (for example morning brief and afternoon debrief sessions);
- All surfaces, crockery, cutlery etc. should be thoroughly washed after use;
- Door handles, hand holds / rails etc. to be cleaned periodically throughout the day.

Smoking areas – where possible, these should be extended or secondary areas made, and instruction to maintain 2m separation during smoke breaks issued. Consideration should be given to providing a secure and sanitary disposal container for smoking residues.

CA/HWRC sites

- As CA/HWRC sites are places where members of the public may meet in numbers site operators are encouraged to close sites until Social Distancing is relaxed. If there is necessity and it is essential for CA/HWRC sites remain open, then in addition to the above general measures;

- Issue instructions to site employees aimed at reducing the risk of transmission from those third parties using sites. Minimise face to face contact – keep mobile plant windows closed, and if you must speak directly maintain at least 2m separation etc.;
- Issue instructions to cease assisting members of the public with wastes, keep Social Distance from members of the public to reduce the risk of transmission.

Vehicles and collections operations

Obeying the 2-metre rule of Social Distancing is difficult for personnel who work together in the cabs of waste collection vehicles. However, as a key service it is important waste collection operations continue.

Consideration should be given to reducing the number of persons who must share cab space where this is practicable. For example, it may be possible to reduce crew numbers (provided safety standards are maintained). In some areas it might also be possible for crews to travel independently to a particular area or estate and work as a group to fill RCVs that are sent with individual drivers and which go off to tip sequentially as they are filled and return. Additional vehicles should be used to follow RCV's when an additional person be required for collection purposes.

Some operators have introduced clear screens in vehicle cabs to improve separation between driver and passenger. Whatever method is used organisations should take suitable and sufficient measures to ensure that employees have access to a sufficient supply of soap and water, alcohol based sprays or wipes and other materials for them to be able to maintain a high standard of hygiene.

Where possible maintain consistent crew rosters (same crew members in each team every day) and minimise close interactions between crews. It is recognised that employee absence and crew competency requirements may limit the extent to which this is possible.

Cabs should have available alcohol or soap-based cleansing spray and/or wipes available for all surfaces which **must be cleaned periodically** throughout the day and especially at the end of each shift. Door-handles, hand holds/rails, dashboards, steering wheels, hand-brake levers, gearbox controls and indicator stalks etc should be paid particular attention to. Where a vehicle may have contained a confirmed case then the vehicle should be parked up for a minimum of 72 hours before being cleaned down.

See advice at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>

Collections operations may result in contact between collection operatives/drivers and members of the public/customer employees. In these cases, social distancing should be followed (keep at least 2 metres/>6 feet away from other persons). Should this prove impossible, such as a member of the public not being willing to 'stand away from their bin' the waste should not be collected.

Statutory equipment inspections

Companies may experience difficulties regarding meeting their legal obligations concerning the statutory inspection of items such as lifting equipment and pressure systems.

At the time of writing many insurance inspection bodies are continuing to operate in consultation with their clients. However, if statutory inspections are not able to be completed due to the current situation, businesses must make every effort to ensure that plant maintenance is continued and internal inspection processes are carried out as normal.

Under certain circumstances with the agreement of a suitable competent person, some legislation does allow thorough examinations/statutory inspections to be postponed to a later date. Where possible they should take advice from their competent person / insurance inspection provider relating to the specific item, based on risk, use, previous inspections etc. They should also identify any additional actions they should take related to the equipment being used to control risk. The purpose of this is to enable the user/owner and the competent person to satisfy themselves that the safety of the system will not be prejudiced if the interval between examinations is extended.

Even if such options are taken, it still remains the duty-holders responsibility to ensure that the equipment is safe to use. If there are concerns regarding the safety of any item of plant or lifting equipment then the equipment must be taken out of service immediately.

Disclaimer and WISHNI

The Waste Industry Safety and Health (WISHNI) Forum in Northern Ireland exists to identify, devise and promote activities to improve industry health and safety performance.

This information document has been prepared by health and safety practitioners associated with WISHNI to assist health and safety improvements in the waste management industry. It is not formal guidance and represents good practice, which typically may go beyond the strict requirements of health and safety law.

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