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LONDON FIRE BRIGADE

Fire Safety Guidance Note: Returning to work after the Coronavirus lockdown

GN100

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The London Fire Commissioner (the Commissioner) is the fire and rescue authority for London. The Commissioner is responsible for enforcing the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (The Order) in London.

This Guidance Note provides fire safety advice in respect of key Fire Safety matters to consider on returning to work after the Coronavirus lockdown.

This Note is one of a series produced by the Commissioner to provide advice on various aspects of fire safety. If you require any further guidance on the advice given or require advice on another topic please visit your local Fire Safety Office, telephone 020 8555 1200 and ask for the nearest Fire Safety Office, or visit the London Fire Brigade web site at http://www.london-fire.gov.uk.

1 Introduction

1.1 As business operations start to resume, there are some key Fire Safety matters to consider. The London Fire Brigade has produced this guidance to assist businesses returning to work from the Coronavirus lockdown, to operate in a manner to keep them safe from fire. Whilst also, where possible, still addressing the risks posed by Coronavirus.

1.2 All businesses should continue to follow all advice from HM Government, Public Health England and the Health and Safety Executive with regard to the pandemic including social distancing, hygiene and access through the building, such as one-way systems and the use of lifts.

1.3 It is also important for all businesses to consider the impact a fire would have, especially where different measures are implemented, to follow HM Government advice on social distancing. Emergency plans and evacuations should still enable all staff and visitors, to reach a place of safety outside of the building quickly and in the most efficient manner.

1.4 The measures as detailed below are specific to returning to work after the Coronavirus lockdown. As such, this guidance is only valid for the duration of the current situation, after which it should be disregarded.

2 Fire Risk Assessment

2.1 Upon re-opening your business following the easing of the lockdown restrictions, you should review your Fire Risk Assessment where it is necessary to do so. This is to ensure that it takes into account any changes to your business operations due to the Coronavirus pandemic and the impact this may have on your preventative and protective fire safety measures. The review should consider the following:

- staffing levels and availability to carry out an evacuation where required;
- 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.

NB: This list is not exhaustive and other measures may need to also be considered.

3   Emergency Evacuation Plan

3.1   The Emergency Evacuation Plan for the premises needs to be reviewed. This is to ensure that it aligns with your reviewed Fire Risk Assessment and current staffing levels for the building. Any Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans that were in place prior to the lockdown that are still required, need to be reviewed with those individuals, ensuring they are still suitable in line with the reviewed Emergency Evacuation Plan.

3.2   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.

4   Fire safety management

4.1   Before your business reopens, you should check all high risk areas (e.g. kitchens, plant rooms, electrical intakes, server rooms, boiler rooms) to ensure no or minimal combustible materials have built up during the lockdown. Particular care should be taken when re-energising any plant and equipment, to minimise ignition risks.

4.2   Where portable electrical equipment and appliances have been switched off during the lockdown restrictions, you should consider if portable appliance testing is required to ensure the safety of this equipment before reuse. This consideration should be extended to staff returning to work with privately owned non-tested portable appliances and charging equipment.

4.3   If you are using or storing Alcohol based hand sanitizer, you should consider the flammability and associated risks. Please familiarise yourself with all warning labels and keep away from ignition sources i.e. heat, sparks, open flames, hot surfaces and smoking materials.

5   Fire Safety Systems

5.1   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. Fully functioning systems are vital to the safety of your business and all those working in or visiting the premises. If you identify any faults with the systems, any required maintenance or repairs should be carried out before returning to work.

5.2   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. Contact should be made with your service provider to ensure that their service to you is not affected by the Coronavirus pandemic.

5.3   When returning to work and testing fire alarm equipment, care should be taken to manage or prevent unwanted fire signals or false alarms to the emergency services. If sent to the Brigade, these false alarms divert our resources away from responding to emergencies or supporting the effort against Coronavirus.

6   Means of escape routes

6.1   Businesses should carry out an inspection of the escape routes (e.g. stairways and corridors) to ensure that they are all clear and accessible for all people in the building. This inspection should include all external parts of the escape route to ensure fire exit doors can be opened in an emergency (these might have been locked during the lockdown) and no obstructions exist once

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outside of the building. If you share an escape route with another business, remember that they may not be open. Arrangements may be needed with these businesses to ensure shared escape routes can still be used, or alternative escape routes located.

6.2   Fire doors on escape routes are vital to the protection of those routes and to your staff, as they can prevent a fire and/or smoke spreading through your building. Fire doors should remain closed and not held open to prevent occupants within the building from touching them, unless they are fitted with a device that automatically closes the door when your fire alarm actuates.

6.3   Where escape routes have been altered to implement social distancing and other safety measures within your building, this needs to be communicated to all staff so they can familiarise themselves with these changes. Any fire action notices will need amending, where necessary.

7   Staff Training

7.1   Where staff numbers have changed, businesses must ensure that they continue to provide appropriate staff training on their return, ensuring that all staff know what to do in a fire situation. Where staff with specific responsibilities during an evacuation i.e. fire wardens or fire marshals have not returned to work, you must ensure that other suitably trained staff are available or appointed as necessary.

8   Assembly Point

8.1   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 system, arrangements to account for the safe evacuation of all staff are needed.

9   Meeting the Fire Brigade

9.1   In the event of an incident, a nominated person should be assigned to meet the fire brigade Incident Commander upon their arrival, to exchange information and hand over plans etc. HM Government rules on social distancing should still be observed.

10   Premises Information Boxes

10.1   Where plans for evacuation are contained within Premises Information Boxes then you should ensure that these are current with the situation and updated as evacuation plans are reviewed.

11   Firefighter access and facilities

11.1   Before returning to work, all facilities and access for firefighters i.e. rising mains and firefighting lifts etc. should be tested. Fully functioning systems are vital to the safety of firefighters attending your business in an emergency. If you identify any faults with the systems, any required maintenance or repairs should be carried out before returning to work. Business should also ensure that all access points to their business are available for emergency vehicles.

12   Contractors

12.1   Where contractors return to your business to carry out essential works, you need to ensure they are aware of any changes to your emergency plans and the risks posed to them by this.

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13 Arson

13.1 When returning to work, business owners should ensure that there have been, and continue to be, regular collections of waste and combustible material. Refuse that has been allowed to accumulate should be removed or moved away from the vicinity of the premises, as this can be a target for arson attacks. All security measures should be tested to ensure that they are still in operation and provide for safety. Staff should be reminded that the disposal of any smoking materials should be completed safely and away from refuse.

14 Emergency planning & salvage

14.1 Where your business has emergency plans and salvage plans e.g. heritage premises, you should make sure they are up to date and easily accessible. If you have reduced staffing levels, you may need to adjust your plans as necessary.

Should you have any further queries then visit the our website at:
https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/safety/the-workplace/

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