

Toolbox Talk

Scaffolding operations during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic

Issue 3 – 14 July 2020



DISCUSSION

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to operatives involved in scaffolding operations during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. COVID-19 is a respiratory virus which is primarily spread through droplets generated when an infected person coughs or sneezes and can be spread easily from person to person. The key measures introduced to control the spread of the virus are to maintain a distance of at least 2.0m (6'6") between individuals and strict measures for cleaning and hygiene. Where maintaining a distance of 2.0m is not viable, it is permissible to maintain 1m provided that risk mitigation measures are also in place.

Risk mitigation measures may include:

- Further increasing the frequency of hand washing and surface cleaning.
- Keeping the activity time involved as short as possible.
- Using screens or barriers to separate people from each other.
- Using back-to-back or side-to-side working (rather than face-to-face) whenever possible.
- Reducing the number of people each person has contact with by using 'fixed teams or partnering' (so each person works with only a few others).

Note - Mitigation measures should always be detailed within your risk assessments.

If you or any work colleague are displaying any potential coronavirus symptoms;

OR,

If you have any concerns about the welfare facilities or the work environment (site) regarding measures to protect workers from coronavirus (e.g. social distancing, cleaning and hygiene regimes) then you should...

- **STOP** work
- **REMOVE** yourself to a position of safety
- **REPORT** immediately to your supervisor or manager (ideally by telephone)

TRAVEL TO AND FROM WORK

Wherever possible workers should travel to site alone using their own transport or only share with other members of the household.

Public transport should be avoided if at all possible and an alternative form of transit adopted. e.g. cycling or walking if feasible. Social distancing and hygiene advice must be obeyed.

Workers are reminded to follow current guidance when travelling on public transport.

If operatives cannot travel alone and have no other option than to share a vehicle, current government and industry guidance advises:

- Journeys should be shared with the same individuals each day and with the minimum number of people at any one time.
- They should avoid touching their face at all times.
- Good ventilation (i.e. keeping the windows open) and facing away from each other may help to reduce the risk of transmission.
- The vehicle (including private vehicles) should be cleaned regularly using gloves and standard cleaning products, with particular emphasis on handles and other areas where passengers may touch surfaces.
- On leaving the vehicle, all occupants should wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser if washing facilities are not immediately available.

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For further information see the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) or National Access & Scaffolding Confederation websites.

When workers arrive home after work, they should change and wash before having any close contact with members of their household.

When travelling at work or between site locations, workers should travel alone if possible. If workers have no option but to share a vehicle, then they should follow the same guidance as for travelling to and from work.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Before starting any job, a suitable and sufficient risk assessment must be carried out. In addition to the usual hazards associated with scaffolding operations.

Where it is not possible to follow social distancing guidelines in full it should be considered whether that activity needs to continue for the business to continue to operate, and if so, all the mitigating actions possible should be taken to reduce the risk of transmission.

Any additional measures implemented to control the risk of coronavirus infection, should not increase the overall level of risk for any particular activity. e.g. work at height.

Hierarchy	Typical Measures
Eliminate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workers who are unwell with symptoms of Coronavirus (COVID-19) should not travel to or attend the workplace. Rearrange tasks to enable them to be done by one person, or by maintaining social distancing measures. Avoid skin-to-skin and face-to-face contact. Stairs should be used in preference to lifts or hoists and consider one-way systems. Consider alternative or additional mechanical aids to reduce worker interface. <p><i>Site Meetings</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only absolutely necessary meeting participants should attend. Attendees should be at least two metres apart from each other. Rooms should be well ventilated/windows opened to allow fresh air circulation. Consider holding meetings in open areas where possible.
Reduce	<p><i>Where the social distancing measures (2 metres) cannot be applied:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise the frequency and time workers are within 2 metres of each other. Minimise the number of workers involved in these tasks. Workers should work side-by-side, or facing away from each other, rather than face-to-face. Lower the worker capacity of lifts and hoists to reduce congestion and contact at all times. Regularly clean common touchpoints, doors, buttons, handles, vehicle cabs, tools, equipment etc. Increase ventilation in enclosed spaces. Workers should wash their hands before and after using any equipment.
Isolate	<p><i>Keep groups of workers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Together in teams e.g. do not change workers within teams. As small as possible. Away from other workers where possible. Allocate demarcated segregation bays between individuals.
Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider introducing an enhanced authorisation process. Provide additional supervision to monitor and manage compliance.
Behaviours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The measures necessary to minimise the risk of spread of infection rely on everyone in the industry taking responsibility for their actions and behaviours. An open and collaborative approach should be encouraged between workers and employers on site, where any issues can be openly discussed and addressed.
PPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sites should not use RPE for Coronavirus (COVID-19) where two metre social distancing guidelines are met. Coronavirus (COVID-19) needs to be managed through social distancing, hygiene and the hierarchy of control and not through the use of PPE. Workplaces should not encourage the precautionary use of extra PPE to protect against Coronavirus (COVID-19).

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MATERIALS

Where possible, materials should be loaded/unloaded from vehicles or in storage yards by forklift or crane.

- Manual handling of materials should only be undertaken if social distancing rules can be maintained.
- You should not approach or congregate around material storage areas, bins or racks unless social distancing rules are observed at all times.

SITE ACCESS AND SITE RESPONSIBILITIES

The Client or Principal Contractor is responsible for strict requirements on sites for protection of all workers from coronavirus, these include:

- Maintaining social distancing (2.0m) or 1.0m with risk mitigation where 2.0m is not viable.
- Enhanced measures and facilities for cleaning and hygiene on site (including at site entrances and exits).
- Additional parking facilities for parking cars and bicycles on or near the site.
- Arrangements for accessing the site and facilities (e.g. staggered start and finish times, queuing systems, one-way routes and increased facilities to maintain social distances and hygiene).
- Emergency arrangements (including if someone is taken ill).
- Arrangements for managing and checking these additional protective measures.

If the site arrangements are not adequately provided, used or maintained, remember the Key Message;

“Stop, Remove and Report!”

HAND WASHING

Sites should provide additional hand washing facilities to the usual welfare facilities if a large spread out site, or significant numbers of personnel on site;

- Wash your hands with soap and water (or if unavailable, hand sanitiser) for at least 20 seconds to help protect against the spread of coronavirus.
- Wash your hands on entering and before leaving site, before and after meals and breaks, before and after using toilet facilities and before and after entering offices, changing or meeting facilities.

TOILET FACILITIES

Sites should restrict the number of people using toilet facilities at any one time e.g. use a welfare attendant

- Wash hands before and after using the facilities.
- Report any cleaning concerns to the site manager / supervisor.

WELFARE FACILITIES

Whilst there is a requirement for construction sites to provide a means of heating food and making hot drinks, these are exceptional circumstances and where it is not possible to introduce a means of keeping equipment clean between use, kettles, microwaves etc. must be removed from use.

- Break times should be staggered to reduce congestion and contact at all times.
- Hand cleaning facilities or hand sanitiser should be available at the entrance of any room where people eat and should be used by workers when entering and leaving the area.
- The workforce should be asked to bring pre-prepared meals and refillable bottles from home.
- Workers should sit 2.0m apart, or 1.0m with risk mitigation where 2.0m is not viable.
- Seating and tables should be reconfigured to reduce face-to-face interactions and avoid all contact.

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SCAFFOLDING OPERATIONS

As it is difficult to consistently apply appropriate risk mitigation measures for scaffolding operations, it is recommended that 2.0m social distancing is maintained at all times. This requirement may be relaxed to 1.0m if suitable risk mitigation measures are devised and introduced.

Whilst evidence suggests that the wearing of face coverings does not provide adequate protection against the spread of the virus, workers who want to wear a face covering should be allowed to do so.

Scaffolding teams should be as small as practicable. e.g. gangs of two allow for one operative to erect whilst the other is transferring materials. This provides easier compliance with rules for 2.0m social distancing. For large/high structures gangs of three operatives may be more suitable or a number of small teams may be used, provided they are allocated and remain in separately defined areas throughout the structure.

For scaffolds with a relatively small plan area (e.g. towers and small birdcages) only one operative should access each lift at any one time. On long or wide structures, such as independents or birdcages, you may work on the same level provided that you remain a minimum distance of one (2.0m) bay (i.e. a segregation bay) between each other at all times.

- Job safety briefings must be undertaken with small teams, in the open air where possible and 2.0m social distancing maintained throughout.
- All scaffolding work carried out at height should be conducted in strict compliance with the current edition of SG4.
- Work should be planned so that there is no requirement for two persons to pass within 2.0m of each other on a scaffold lift or in a confined area on site.
- You should avoid work directly above or below each other as this arrangement does not afford the same protection as when positioned 2.0m apart horizontally.
- Materials transferred vertically should be lifted or lowered by the use of gin wheels, handlines or mechanical means (such as goods hoists, transport platforms etc).

A safe system of work may then be arranged as follows:

- Scaffolder A gains access to the next lift and positions himself at one end, near to the access ladder.
- Tubes and fittings are then transferred from below and stored on the lift.
- When placing materials, care must be taken not to overload a local area of the scaffold and to maintain a clear walkway in case of an emergency evacuation.
- Once Scaffolder A is clear of the access point, Scaffolder B can then gain access to this lift.
- Scaffolder B then receives the remaining materials from the labourer below.
- Scaffolder B then follows behind Scaffolder A, fitting transoms and boards (See **Figure 1**).
- Once Scaffolder A clear of the access point, Scaffolder B can then gain access to this lift.
- Scaffolder B then receives the remaining materials from the labourer below.
- Scaffolder B then follows behind Scaffolder A, fitting transoms and boards (See **Figure 2**).
- Work then progresses in this way along the lift, with both scaffolders maintaining at least one 2.0m segregation bay between them at all times.
- Bracing, ties, advanced guardrails and ladders may be fitted by either or both scaffolders as work progresses along the lift, ensuring that at least one segregation bay remains between them at all times.

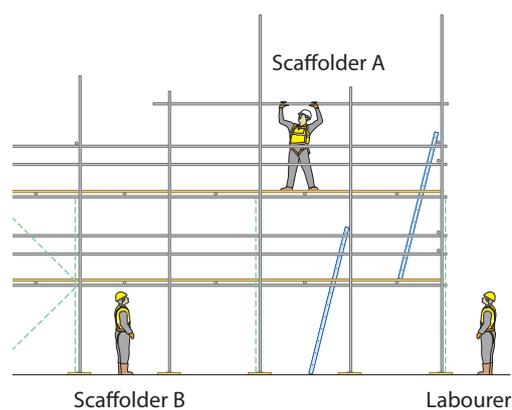


Figure 1

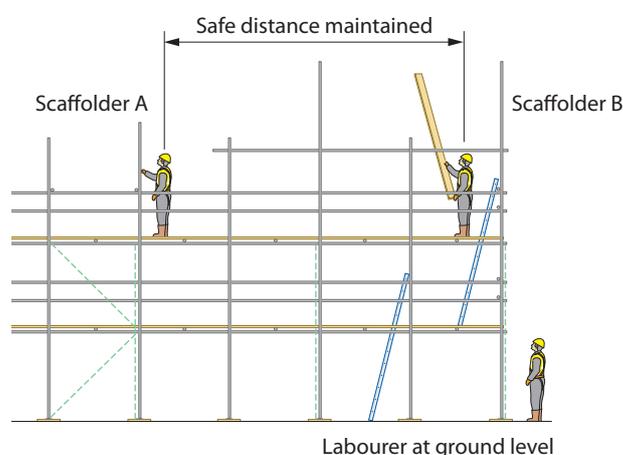


Figure 2

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When the lift is complete, one scaffolder gains access to the lift above (scaffolders should take care not to pass each other in close proximity) and the process is then repeated to the full height of the scaffold.

Other safe systems of work may be devised to suit different working situations and different types of scaffolds, but these must always strive to facilitate the strict requirements of maintaining social distancing at all times. Where this is not possible the task risk assessment must identify suitable controls.

Before the scaffold is dismantled, the work sequence should be planned to ensure that all necessary safety precautions and social distancing rules are adopted.

RESCUE

It is essential to have a suitable rescue and recovery plan in place for any work involving fall arrest equipment, working in line with NASC guidance SG19 *A Guide to Formulating a Rescue Plan*. Should an operative accidentally fall and be suspended from their safety harness this must be considered as a medical emergency and rescue plan invoked immediately without delay.

During and immediately after the rescue operation, it may not be possible to maintain the social distancing rules throughout, but life-saving procedures must take precedence. A suitable rescue procedure, which minimises contact time or incorporates available PPE and enhanced hygiene procedures etc. must therefore be in place.

Before starting any job, make sure that you are fully aware of the emergency procedures, including the means of raising the alarm and alerting the rescue team. The method and means of effecting the rescue should always be detailed on the risk assessment.

More detailed guidance is available in NASC document 'Guidance for Scaffolding Operations During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic' (GSO).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Site facilities - Who should you report any concerns to?
2. Emergency procedures – what should you be fully aware of?
3. What should you be doing at all times to stop the spread of the virus?

Thank everyone for their time and attention, please sign the attendance record.

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or National Access & Scaffolding Confederation websites.

