

Coronavirus **COVID-19**



What Should I Do?



Jones Engineering



A Guide for Building Owners / Managers for Mothballing Buildings

Guidance for Building Owners / Managers for Mothballing Buildings

The Irish Government has advised that essential maintenance and repair remains important work and government guidelines must be followed.

Due to COVID 19 many buildings will become low use or empty, as businesses close and working from home increases. Estate and building owners, landlords and tenants will therefore seek to adjust maintenance appropriately.

The extent to which maintenance can be varied will differ based on the utilisation, building/ estate configuration (e.g. centralised systems or separate standalone systems by areas) and operational requirements.

In many cases buildings will not require to be fully mothballed. Instead they may become low use with skeleton staff and low-key maintenance implemented. Elements of the building may be needed to support the working from home staff, such as server rooms to support the online working.

By assessing the needs and applying principles of risk assessment to produce a method of working to satisfy the government requirements for Covid 19 in relation to, statutory and insurance requirements (Legal, Lease Stipulations etc.) provides for the ongoing service of critical plant.

Key minimum levels of maintenance activity should ensure:

- Statutory Compliance
- Property Security
- Building Fabric Protection
- Business Critical Systems Operation
- Adherence to any Insurance cover requirements

There has been no Government relaxation on carrying out 'Statutory' Planned Maintenance tasks, as Statutory Tasks by their very nature are designed to ensure Health and Safety, if the current regime is operating to SFG20 and continues to do so the property will be safe and compliant.

LOW USE OCCUPIED SPACES – KEY MAINTENANCE

What is considered a low use occupied building?

Occupied is defined as ‘*being used by someone*’, this could relate to a low use skeleton staff, cleaners in the building, security and reception attendants or even someone who has access to the building and pops in to collect an item, therefore if there is anyone in the building the space is deemed as an occupied area.

If low use low key maintenance is employed, then a maintenance strategy will need to be implemented and followed. This will primarily look at maintaining statutory/insurance requirements and maintaining the security of the building. Examples of requirements to be maintained in underutilised buildings is as follows:

- Water system hygiene requirements under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 see [here](#) for legionella control recommendations.
- Cooling tower L8 compliance and local authority compliance under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005
- Fire detection system testing and maintenance
- Passive fire protection testing and maintenance including fire doors, fire stopping, fire dampers etc.
- Inspection and maintenance of active fire protection such as sprinkler and fire suppression systems, fire extinguishers etc.
- Electrical safety checks
- Gas safety inspections and maintenance
- F-GAS compliance as a legal requirement for air conditioning and refrigeration systems
- Pressure System Safety Regulations for e.g. compressed air and pressurised steam systems
- Security systems monitoring and maintenance
- Compliance under S.I. No. 232/2017 - European Union (Lifts and Safety Components for Lifts) Regulations 2017 for passenger lifts and lifting equipment if they are still to be in service.

The above are examples of common compliance items, but there are many more that could apply, therefore individual site assessment are required to establish the key compliance areas for the site in question, BESA can provide guidance if required.

Strategy Considerations

Strategy considerations could include the following:

- Water systems- Would likely need to be kept operating or else you will have unknown conditions in the systems and it could be a significant cost (and all sample labs are possibly going to have an alternate focus), note though with reduced occupancy flushing requirements will likely increase. See [here](#) for flushing procedures and HSA guidelines [here](#) on Legionella during COVID-19.
- For longer durations Insurance companies will require notifying as they will want fire alarms, sprinklers maintained especially if the building is left empty for periods.
- Life Safety, if building are occupied by security or skeleton workforces working it will need emergency lighting, fire alarm systems etc. Emergency generators will need to be tested if they are still being relied upon to provide power in an emergency. Fire suppression systems still need to be checked if they are being left active whilst the building is shut down. Asset such as hydrants and other firefighting facilities need discussion with the local fire brigade to see what they would like to see and are willing to allow.
- Lifts where buildings are occupied need to be continued, but if it can be shown that lift journeys are reduced you may be able to reduce the lift maintenance, but where lifts are still operating they will require “Thorough Examinations” to be carried out as normal. It may be the case that there a multiple lifts in a building and one or more could be removed from operation (This will need to be checked in line with overall building risk and fire strategies).
- Heating systems could potentially be winterised as we move into summer months, and programmed to operate daily for a short period of time. Chillers can be switched off or enabled for a short period of time during the day when temperature may call for its operation if not in free cooling.
- Water Traps – Bacteria colonies begin to become visible within 3 days due to water stagnation and start to cause odours in the area. Following a flushing routine as for water systems will eliminate this. Some sensor taps have an automatic rinse function which will keep the traps primed and water moving within the pipework. Where traps are installed wet traps are installed on coffee machines and dishwashers if these are lying ideal for a period of time it is advised to pour a few cups of water through to remove the stagnant water and ensure the trap remains topped up.