

Construction Sector - Site Operating Procedures

Protecting Your Workforce (COVID 19) - Supplementary Requirements for Plant Occupations

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1. Introduction

The Construction Leadership Council (CLC) has produced guidance through a Site Operating Procedures (SOP) publication on protecting the workforce during the coronavirus-COVID 19 pandemic to minimise the risk of spreading the infection, based on the Government's recommendations on social distancing. The latest CLC SOP document can be downloaded from the following links:

<https://www.constructionleadershipcouncil.co.uk/news/site-operating-procedures-version-3-published/>

<https://builduk.org/coronavirus/>

<https://www.cpa.uk.net/cpalinksgovernmentindustryguidance/>

This publication is focussed on plant and equipment-based occupations and provides tailored guidance on how to comply with the required social distancing outlined in the CLC SOP. Plant operations normally have exclusion zones between the machine and operator, and others, around the machine with the exception being platforms for transportation or accessing (MEWPs, Hoists etc.) which are covered within the CLC SOP.

2. Scope of Occupations

For the purposes of this document, the following listed plant occupations are covered:

- Plant Operator/operatives;
- Supporting workers e.g. slinger/signaller, 'banksman', traffic marshals; rescue personnel;
- Maintenance personnel e.g. mechanics, fitters, inspectors/examiners, installers;
- Plant delivery/collection personnel e.g. 'low-loader' drivers.

3. Preparing the Machine for Work

For all plant operations, there should be where possible a policy of a dedicated operator for each machine, minimising the potential spread within the cab/platform area.

Where a change of operators needs to take place, then a thorough cleaning/sanitising procedure described within the cleaning section of the CLC SOP needs to be carried out each time. Normal handwashing procedures should be undertaken before approaching the machine.

Touch point components for accessing the cab/platform such as steps, handrails, handles, latches etc. should be treated as potentially contaminated and cleaned/sanitised using appropriate products e.g. sanitisers/wipes/detergents etc. before entering both the cab/platform and areas required to conduct pre-start checks. This is particularly important where others have accessed the machine.

Handles, levers, controls, steering wheels, switches, data screens, seat adjusting mechanisms, arm rests etc. within the cab/platform should further be cleaned/sanitised before starting and operating the machine. If gloves have been worn outside of the machine, they should be removed first before cleaning/sanitising takes place and only re-worn after the operator has left the machine.

4. Operating the Machine

Normal exclusion zone requirements apply meaning that direct supporting workers e.g. 'banksman' are clear of all moving parts of an operational machine, with non-supporting outside of the designated exclusion zone.

Where workers need to approach the cab/platform, once permitted to enter the exclusion zone by the operator, they should maintain the required distance (minimum of 2 metres) and not touch, lean or stand on any part of the machine during the conversation. Hand signals or radio communication should be the main communication method in maintaining segregation and distancing. See section 6 – Communications.

Passengers should not be carried in or on the cab/platform unless an integral part of the operation e.g. direct support operative or hoist/MEWP activities. If this is the case, then the minimum distance needs to be either maintained between any seating or standing position, minimised time spent within the area (e.g. less than 15 minutes), the wearing of additional PPE/RPE and the cleansing/sanitising of touch points carried out on a regular basis. This should be in line with the hierarchy of controls outlined in the CLC SOP.

During break periods, if the operator leaves the cab, hand washing procedures should be carried out before going back to their machine. If gloves are or need to be worn when leaving the machine, they should not touch controls, handrails etc. and removed when approaching the machine. If other workers entered the cab/platform, cleaning/sanitising procedures as outlined in section 3 should be carried out.

5. Direct Support Activities

Gloves will routinely be used to handle equipment such as lifting chains, loads, machine components etc. during work and this should be maintained. The condition of gloves should be regularly checked and where skin is exposed, the gloves should be changed with cleaning/sanitising procedures undertaken before wearing the new gloves. Communication with an operator or driver by marshals, signallers, support staff etc. should be in accordance with the advice on section 6: communication.

If an operation requires the use of a second-person and is being supplied by the plant owner/supplier, they should avoid where possible travelling in the same vehicle to and from the site. If they need to, then the guidance in the CLC SOP needs to be followed.

6. Communications

To maintain an effective exclusion zone and personal distancing, hand signals or two-way radio communication should be employed at all times.

If radios are to be used, each radio needs to be thoroughly cleaned using sanitising products, particularly around the microphone area, by the user both before and after use as the operation of a radio requires it to be close to the users' face. For this reason, radios should not be shared during the working day and ideally, a radio should be assigned to one person only for the project.

Support workers working directly with the machine e.g. slinger working with an excavator undertaking lifting operations should use hand signals instead. During briefings e.g. for lifting operations, minimum social distancing of 2 metres should be maintained.

7. Ceasing of Operations and Shut Down

More than ever, cab/platforms should be isolated and secured, preventing unauthorised access to the operating station, particularly during extended out-of-service periods or at closed-down sites where they could be subject to intruder break ins.

8. Maintenance, Installation and Inspection Activities

Visiting maintenance, installation and inspection workers should ensure that their vehicle, tools and equipment are cleaned/sanitised prior to leaving the depot or travel start point. If several maintenance workers are required for a particular activity, they should aim to travel separately to the work location and if not, comply with the travel to work requirements within the CLC SOP.

On arrival at the site, they should find out where the authorised hand washing locations are and other special procedures being implemented by the site.

High-risk maintenance/installation-type work should be either prevented or re-scheduled as emergency service availability may be compromised.

Before working on any machine, they should follow the cleaning/sanitising advice described in section 3, including cleaning/sanitising panel access handles, latches, support struts etc. where they are to work.

Where harnesses are being used for working at height e.g. by installation staff, they should be restricted to one wearer – one harness.

Gloves should be worn by maintenance staff anyway but be regularly checked that they are in a sound condition and are regularly replaced. Tools should not be shared, even with other maintenance staff unless unavoidable.

Workers carrying out installation activities e.g. fitting jibs to cranes may require co-workers to be within 2 metres of each other to carry out the activity. Where the risk assessment requires additional PPE - face masks, aprons etc. to minimise the risk of transmission to or from each individual when no other alternatives are available, then consideration must be given so that the wearing of any additional PPE/RPE does not compromise the workers visibility, dexterity etc. to work safely and allow the additional equipment to remain fully functional.

On completion of maintenance or inspection activities, tools, equipment should be cleaned/sanitised before being returned to storage with hands washed or sanitised before the vehicle is entered.

9. Loader/securer Operations

Clean/sanitising procedures as described in section 3 should be undertaken by drivers to their vehicle prior to leaving the depot. If delivering a machine or equipment, the cab/platform or touch points of the equipment need to be cleaned/sanitised as well.

If additional workers are required to assist with the loading/unloading activity, they should aim to travel in separate vehicles. On arrival at the site, drivers should find out where the authorised hand washing locations are and other special procedures being implemented by the site.

Before loading, a repeat undertaking of the cleaning/sanitising procedures should be done on each machine or equipment to be loaded. Gloves should be worn whilst handling the vehicle body or trailer, securing equipment and any materials being used for loading/unloading but removed prior to entering the cab.

During loading/unloading activities, other workers should not enter the vehicle cab or handle any of the securing equipment unless part of the operation.

On completion of loading or unloading activities, cleaning/sanitising procedures should be followed before the driver enters their vehicle.

10. Rescue Operations

Difficult-to-reach cab/platforms such as tower cranes or MEWPs, or where plant is being installed or de-rigged mean that consideration needs to be taken in ensuring rescue operations can meet the requirements of the CLC SOP. Where rescue workers need to wear PPE/RPE, consideration should be given so that the wearing of any additional PPE/RPE does not compromise a rescue worker's ability to work safely and allow the PPE to remain fully functional.

Consideration must take into account the availability of a full complement of rescue team personnel and/or equipment, either the emergency services or dedicated response teams, particularly where injury or potential infection to the operator has occurred. With the current pressures on the emergency services, the availability or timing of professional medical help may be compromised as outlined in the CLC SOP.

Alternative methods of work or other equipment should be considered as a temporary alternative to reduce resultant issues arising from needing to carry out a rescue operation at height.

11. Sources of Information

Sector-specific guidance on social distancing in the workplace:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/social-distancing-in-the-workplace-during-coronavirus-covid-19-sector-guidance#construction> 

Public Health England guidance of non-medical cleaning and disinfection:

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

Health and Safety Executive Guidance

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/coronavirus.htm#>

NOTE: Whilst every care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the material contained within this publication, no liability is accepted by the Construction Plant-hire Association in respect of the information given.