The Department of Business Enterprise and Employment (DBEI) issued the *Return to Work Safely Protocol COVID-19 Specific National Protocol for Employers and Workers on 8 May 2020*. This addresses measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the Workplace and the requirement to develop a business COVID-19 Response Plan. Whilst the primary focus will be on creating a workplace that prevents the transmission of COVID-19, employers and management also need to consider those risks related to reoccupying premises and restarting work processes or equipment following disuse for a period of time.

Scope

The purpose of this Risk Advisory Notice (RAN) is to assist Delegated State Authorities (DSAs) to ensure that their buildings' fabric and systems are risk assessed and fit for reoccupation. This RAN sets out statutory requirements and best practice on the management of the following risks:

- Fire safety management and emergency procedures;
- Building equipment and systems;
- Building fabric and management.

The *Return to Work Safely Protocol* requires employers, as part of their COVID-19 response plan, to update their occupational health and safety statements and risk assessments.

This RAN is intended to be applied to office buildings which are returning to use following a period of vacancy or near-vacancy during the COVID-19 restrictions. It does not apply to workplace settings that have continued to operate during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Who should complete the Building Reoccupation Risk Assessments?

It is the responsibility of DSAs to complete risk assessments for all buildings that are occupied by their servants and / or agents and which are used to deliver DSA services. Typically, the risk assessment would be completed by a *Building Manager[1]*. The *Building Manager* may require the assistance of a competent person to complete some aspects of the risk assessment. This should be arranged by the DSA estates/property section.

For OPW-managed premises, should testing or works by external experts be required, the OPW helpdesk (Helpdesk@opw-helpdesk.ie) will arrange testing on an ad hoc request-only basis and will also take the lead on any remedial system work or maintenance that may arise.

How to use the Building Reoccupation Risk Assessments template

The Building Reoccupation Risk Assessments set out the typical risks / hazards resulting from the occupation of buildings. Building Managers should:

1. Identify if the hazard exists;
2. Review recommended controls; delete those which do not apply. Appendix A contains additional notes for hazards and Appendix B has reference documentation for additional information.
3. Determine site-specific controls and include in the risk assessment.
4. Track and close all controls.
5. Share risk assessments with relevant DSA staff members. Review and update in line with COVID-19 advices. Retain all documentation on file.

This guidance document contains a non-exhaustive list of structural and non-structural facilities and services which are required to be managed and maintained in typical State premises. The document is provided in editable format to allow DSAs to consider site-specific factors and incorporate these into their existing risk assessments and amend as appropriate.

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[1] As appropriate this may be an accommodation officer, facilities manager or designated person in a DSA.

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SCA-RA-15-01

COVID-19 Building Reoccupation Risk Assessment -**Part 1 Fire and emergency**					
Hazard / Risk	**Hazard / Risk Present?**	**Controls/Actions**	**Control Complete**	**Date Completed**	**Completed By**
Fire equipment faulty / not operational	Yes ☐ No ☐	Ensure <u>fire register</u> is in date prior to the reoccupation of buildings. In particular, ensure the following test of fire safety equipment and systems are carried out before reoccupation: • a full functional test of the fire detection and alarm system (using multiple call points across the site and involving the call receiving centre if appropriate); • a full discharge test of the emergency lighting system across the site; • a visual inspection of all fire extinguishers to ensure that they are correctly located, full and not obviously damaged and that annual servicing is within date; • check that automatic fire dampers, smoke venting and smoke extraction systems are operational.			
Means of escape unsafe	Yes ☐ No ☐	Check means of escape. Ensure: • fire escape routes are clear of any obstructions; • final fire escape doors are operational and easily opened in direction of escape; • fire doors are in good condition and doors are not propped unless there is a release mechanism. Ensure that any COVID-19 measures introduced do not impact means of escape and the building design for safe escape			
Emergency plans do not take into account the changes brought about by COVID-19 response e.g. fewer resources to operate plan	Yes ☐ No ☐	Review emergency procedures and update to account for COVID-19 arrangements. Consider: • if there is sufficient personnel e.g. who will attend the fire panel? Who will call and liaise with the emergency services? • how will all persons in the building be accounted for? • persons with a personal emergency evacuation plan (PEEP). Where possible these persons should be accommodated to work at home, if their plan cannot be achieved during the COVID-19 crisis. • have staff been informed of changes to emergency procedures? Have these procedures been tested? • are there sufficient first aid personnel?			
Site-specific controls:					

COVID-19 Building Reoccupation Risk Assessment – **Part 2 Building systems and equipment**					
Hazard/Risk	**Hazard /Risk Present?**	**Controls/Actions**	**Control Complete**	**Date Completed**	**Completed By**
Building equipment is damaged or non-operational	Yes ☐ No ☐	Visually inspect equipment and ensure statutory inspections are in date prior to the reoccupation of buildings. For equipment which has not been used for an extended period of time, consider whether a statutory inspection / service is needed, even if one is not due. • Lifting equipment • Pressure vessels • Gas appliances • Electrical equipment • Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning - HVAC • Fire protection and detection equipment refer Part 1.			
Possible COVID-19 transmission through HVAC	Yes ☐ No ☐	The primary control is a serviced and maintained system. Review HVAC settings such as extending operating hours, with your provider. See European Centre for Disease Control guidance Heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems in the context of COVID-19.			
Legionella bacteria may have grown to unsafe levels in unused water systems	Yes ☐ No ☐	The system may require re-commissioning (that is thorough flushing, cleaning and disinfection and / or controlled flushing of outlets such as taps, showers and toilets), prior to return to use and reopening of the building. Risk assessment review and water testing should also be considered as part of the re-commissioning plan. The services of a competent person may be required to provide further advice. Wet cooling systems, which have been shut down, will require recommissioning by a competent person prior to re-use.			
Site-specific controls:					

COVID-19 Building Reoccupation Risk Assessment – **Part 3.Building management**					
Hazard/Risk	**Hazard /Risk Present?**	**Controls/Actions**	**Control Complete**	**Date Completed**	**Completed By**
Various building related hazards may have increased in risk levels due to low / no occupancy, reduced maintenance of the building or from changes introduced as part of the COVID-19 plan	Yes ☐ No ☐	Complete a thorough walkthrough of all internal and external areas of the building before re-occupancy of building. Identify any hazards and implement appropriate controls before re-occupancy. Consider the following non-exhaustive list: **Radon-** Determine whether buildings / rooms which have identified radon levels have been sufficiently ventilated. Identify if further ventilation and retesting is required. **Mould -** Focus on where there has been mould growth in the past and all walls close to gutters and downpipes and adjacent to water pipes. **Odour -** Focus on past problem areas, waste management areas and toilets. **Pest control –** Carry out thorough inspection to determine if possible infestations have occurred. If necessary review and consider controls including: nets, spikes, traps, chemicals, waste management, sanitary hygiene and pest control company. **Waste management -** Review and ensure it is in line with COVID-19 requirements, which may require greater capacity, segregation, etc. **Chemicals –** If you have increased use of chemicals for cleaning and other infection control measures, ensure they are stored in a suitable location with risk assessments and access to safety data sheets. **Security –** Check boundary fence, perimeter lighting and CCTV are operational. **Grounds maintenance -** Where premises include grounds, gardens or planted areas, little or no maintenance may have been completed since the commencement of restrictions. Ensure vehicle, pedestrian or cycling thoroughfares are clear and all lighting and barriers are operational.			
Housekeeping arranging not in line with COVID-19 requirements	Yes ☐ No ☐	Review housekeeping checks to incorporate additional COVID-19 building requirements, as per the **Return to Work Safely Protocol**.			
Site-specific controls:					

Appendix A- Notes/ Guidance for Risk Assessment	
1.	**Fire and emergency**
Fire equipment check	In partially occupied buildings, if it is not practical to carry out normal safety / fire checks as a minimum, the responsible person should ensure the fire alarm panel is fully operational, all exits and escape routes are clear and conduct a general walkabout to ensure no other issues are arising.
Emergency procedures	The Fire Safety Act 1981 places the legal requirement on the occupier to account for all persons in the building in the event of an emergency. During the COVID-19 crisis there may not be sufficient trained staff to conduct a full sweep of the building, therefore other controls will be required to ensure the safety of the occupants. This could include: restricting access to areas in building, using a sign-in system and operating buddy systems. Consider aligning with COVID-19 contract tracing system in place. During the COVID-19 crisis it may not be practical to conduct a full building test evacuation. Continue to test evacuation arrangements and conduct fire drills; however the focus should be on staff familiarity with procedures, rather than full building evacuation and the time to complete evacuation.
First aid	In cases where a building is only partly occupied, and a trained first aider is not available or required following a risk assessment, a nominated responsible person will be in charge of an injured or ill person until medical assistance is obtained, as per the Guide to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007. PHECC have stated that any registered practitioner whose CFR, FA or EFR certification was due to lapse after 1March 2020, is automatically extended for the duration of the current COVID 19 pandemic.
2.	**Building systems and equipment**
Gas equipment	Gas appliances, such as boilers and catering equipment, should be maintained in accordance with manufacturer's guidance or an alternative relevant standard such as SFG20, which will normally include at least an annual service. Maintaining such a timeframe is not a strict statutory requirement as long as the equipment is maintained in a safe condition.
Electrical equipment	Simple user checks should be sufficient to establish the safety of portable appliances such as kettles, microwaves, etc., where an existing portable appliance testing (PAT) system is in place. However, use of such appliances should be carefully considered as they present a potential risk of COVID-19 transmission via surface contact.
Legionella	For small, basic hot and cold systems, a good flush through of the system before re-opening with mains water or fresh water would be suitable. For showers not in regular use, flush shower heads into a part filled container of water, ensuring the shower head is submerged under water in the container. For larger buildings or process systems, a more thorough flushing should be performed in order to rid the system of stagnant water and possible build-up of scale or sludge. Make sure when flushing that you have the water system as open as possible so all valves are turned to open to allow a full flush through and removal of stagnant water. Consider parts of the system that could be hard to flush and look at other approaches where necessary.
3.	**Building Fabric and management**
Waste	All waste that has been in contact with an individual with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, including used tissues, and masks if used, should be put in a normal waste bag. Double bagging should be used. The waste bag should be kept for 72 hours, and then thrown in the normal waste.

Appendix B - Source/Reference Material		
Topic	**Title**	**Author/Source**
All	Return to Work Safely Protocol, COVID - 19 Specific National Protocol for Employers and Workers	Government of Ireland
All	Return to Work Guide for Accommodation Officers	Office of Public Works
All	COVID-19 - Advice for Employers and Employees	Health and Safety Authority
All	COVID-19 - Return to Work Safely Templates and Checklists	Health and Safety Authority
All	Guide to SHWW (General Application) Regulations 2007	Health and Safety Authority
All	COVID-19 Workplace Protection and Improvement Guide	NSAI
Electrical	https://stateclaims.ie/uploads/publications/SCA-RA-12-01-A-Guide-To-Portable-Appliance-Testing.pdf	State Claims Agency
Equipment	Inspection and Testing of Equipment and Machinery Regulatory Requirements Part 2: Scheduling	State Claims Agency
Fire	COVID- 19- Protection-Advice to Businesses	National Fire Chief' s Council
Fire	Fire Register (guidance and templates)	State Claims Agency
Fire	https://stateclaims.ie/uploads/publications/Fire-risk-assessment-guidance.pdf	State Claims Agency
Fire	https://stateclaims.ie/uploads/publications/Emergency-plan-guidance-document.pdf	State Claims Agency
First aid	Guide to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007	Health and Safety Authority
First aid	PHECC Covid-19 Advisory V2	Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC)
Grounds Maintenance	Guidance for OPW staff using Plant Protection Products	Office of Public Works
Grounds Maintenance	Tree Safety Management	Office of Public Works
HVAC	COVID-19 guidance document, April 2020	Federation of European Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning Associations (REHVA)
HVAC	SFG- 30 Guide to Good Practice-Mothballing and Re-Commissioning Buildings	HVCA
HVAC	Heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems in the context of COVID-19	ECDC
Legionella	National Guidelines for the Control of Legionellosis in Ireland, 2009	Health Surveillance Protection Centre
Legionella	Health and Safety Authority - Control of Legionella before and after the Covid-19 Pandemic	Health and Safety Authority
Legionella	Guidance for Managing Legionella in Building Water Systems During the COVID-19 Pandemic	European Study Group for Legionella Infections
Legionella	Legionnaires' Disease: Lockdown Risks and Reopening Safely	Chartered Institute for Environmental Health
Legionella	Legionnaire's disease, Technical Guidance HSG 274, Part 2, The control of legionnela in hot and cold water systems	Health Service Executive
Mould	SCA Guidelines for Managing Mould Growth in State Buildings	State Claims Agency
Mould	SCA Guidelines for Maintenance Staff on Managing Mould in State Buildings	State Claims Agency
Asbestos	Asbestos Containing Materials (ACMs) in Workplaces-Practical Guidelines on ACM Management and Abatement,	Health and Safety Authority