



NATIONAL CUSTOM AND SELF BUILD ASSOCIATION

NaCSBA has updated its guidance to working safely on site for self and custom builders and developers during the reintroduced lockdown

January 2021

WORKING SAFELY ON SITE - COVID-19

NATIONAL CUSTOM AND SELF BUILD ASSOCIATION GUIDANCE

CORONAVIRUS: working safely

INTRODUCTION

With the return to another lockdown, the National Custom and Self Build Association (NaCSBA) has updated its guidance to assist both individual self builders and companies undertaking building work.

Under the new lockdown home building is permitted to continue, while builders merchants and the housing market in general are allowed to operate. However, **the need for safe working practices to underpin all decisions on site remains vital**.

This guide is intended to support self builders and businesses about what practices they should be following to ensure they are operating safely. It is intended as a signposting document to support businesses and individuals in their decisions about how they work. It draws extensively on a range of industry knowledge and should be read in conjunction with wider national guidance.

It is important to note that, **ultimately, each site is the responsibility of the owners and/or main contractors, so if you are a self builder then this could mean you!**

THE PRIORITY ON ANY BUILDING SITE IS PEOPLE'S SAFETY, WHICH SHOULD BE THE FIRST PRINCIPLE FOR ALL ACTIVITY, AND EVERY DECISION SHOULD BE WEIGHED AGAINST THIS.

However, NaCSBA believes that with good practice building activity is important as it represents a valuable flow of work for the local and wider economy. Custom and self build have a core role in helping the country to return to economic health, supporting Government objectives and providing a crucial supply of new homes.

THE RULES IN SCOTLAND, WALES AND NORTHERN IRELAND MAY VARY SO CHECK THE SECTIONS BELOW AND FOLLOW NATIONAL ADVICE.

NaCSBA continues an open dialogue with Government, ensuring that the views and needs of custom and self builders are represented. If you have a specific question or would like to share your experiences please [email us on media@nacsba.org.uk](mailto:email_us_on_media@nacsba.org.uk)

The NaCSBA Executive

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NATIONAL GUIDANCE FOR LARGE SITES

There is plenty of guidance from Government and major industry bodies to advise larger development sites, much of which can be applied to smaller sites as well.

- Government guidance: [Working Safely During Coronavirus](#)
- [Construction Leadership Council](#) is on [Version 7 of its Site Operating Procedures \(January 2021\)](#). Based on Public Health England advice, this has detailed guidance about keeping workers safe on site.
- [Construction Industry Coronavirus Form](#) – includes a range of downloadable posters
- Federation of Master Builders: [Coronavirus Guidance](#)
- [House Builders Federation](#) has produced a Charter for Safe Working Practice, including a [downloadable poster for your site](#).
- [BuildUK](#), a representation organisation for over 40% of the UK construction industry with lots of information and guidance.
- Health & Safety Executive: for advice on safe working distances and movement
- The Builders Merchants Federation has a [Branch Operating Guidelines](#)

Small sites are arguably easier to manage than larger sites, purely on the basis that there are fewer people on site, so meeting the 2m safety requirement may be more manageable. Jobs that require teams or several people must be carefully considered to ensure the comply with the Site Operating Procedures guidance.

Confusingly, construction workers [do not feature on the list of critical workers whose children can access educational settings](#).

MANAGING RISK

Establishing what is safe in terms of work is balancing act, and as an employer you are responsible for the safety of workers and anyone else visiting your site. It is essential that you assess the risk of the work on site, to identify sensible measures to minimise risk. [The Health and Safety Executive have interactive tools to help you do this.](#)

Government guidance also includes a series of useful steps:

- Consider who is working on site
- Planning to keep this to a minimum
- Monitoring wellbeing of people working on site and from home
- Keeping in touch with off-site workers
- Providing a safe working environment for home workers

WHO MUST NOT WORK?

Advice is clear that you must not be on site if you have any symptoms whatsoever or are, or live with a vulnerable person, which could be to do with age, pregnancy or an underlying health or clinical condition. Equally, if you are living or share a bubble with someone who is self isolating you should not be on site. While this means some people will not be able to be on site, it supports the wider working population to operate in a safer environment.

If you are responsible for a site then you must ensure that these rules are followed by all who come onto the site at any time. If you think you have symptoms, follow [NHS advice on Coronavirus](#).

CLARITY AROUND CONTRACTS

The Federation of Master Builders (FMB) has excellent advice around contracts. The situation is unprecedented, and consequently few contracts will have information for dealing with current work scenarios.

The [FMB recommends the following](#):

- Assess whether you can meet your contractual requirements
- Agree any necessary contract changes
- Establish understanding about the uncertainty of the current climate
- Plan for future restrictions
- Keep your lender informed

Importantly, check your insurance on any contracts etc, as new policies may now address Coronavirus and exclude it.

The Construction Leadership Council has a [handy quicklinks guide](#) to a range of Covid-19 guidance on a range of subjects, including a statement on payment and contracts. However, check the publication of any guidance to ensure it is up to date.

In terms of contracts, it is important to acknowledge chains within building projects. Any point in the chain could cause a delay that may mean you are unable meet what you have contractually agreed, whether due to labour or supply chain interruptions. Brexit may also have an impact on materials etc.

The situation may impact price, types of materials, deadlines for work, so communication must be open and candid to keep work on track. Ensure any changes are agreed, carefully documented and signed by both parties.

With new work practices from people working from home, check if you can sign digitally for contracts, but always ensure you do your own checks that this is acceptable. [Government](#)

[confirmed that in most cases electronic signatures are acceptable](#), but the situation gets blurry if a document needs witnessing, so seek legal advice.

SCHEDULING WORK

As with contracts, you will need to review your scheduling of work and deliveries, to reflect the inevitable interruptions resulting from the pandemic. This is crucial on a self build, where jobs are often sequential, and there aren't other properties that trades can work on.

This applies to the hire or purchase of equipment, so be certain you have the tools you need to do the job well in advance of them being needed. Users of any plant or equipment should wash their hands properly before and after using any tools, as per [Government guidance](#).

MATERIALS

Another crucial component for scheduling, materials are typically ordered to correspond with jobs, but this may not be practical due to gaps in the delivery and supply chain. Planning permissions may stipulate materials, so alternatives can not necessarily be swapped in – check the conditions attached to your project.

Materials are a commodity that attract theft and may be damaged, so if you are ordering ahead ensure you have a secure space for storage, and check the situation with your insurance around storing on site.

The [National Business Crime Centre has helpful advice](#) for securing professional sites, and many of the principles also apply to smaller sites.

Most manufacturers have detailed websites showcasing their products, as well as case studies illustrating the use of materials. Equally, if you call companies when choosing materials they may be able to post out samples or direct you to other online examples of their materials, such as Instagram or magazine features. Some showrooms – and show houses, are open by appointment only, as long as safe working practices are observed.

INSURANCE

Any stops or restart in work will require you to notify your liability insurers, and equally with returning to site it is imperative that you speak to your liability and professional indemnity insurers to check that cover is in place and appropriate.

FINANCE

Whether development finance or mortgage finance, check in with your lender if the financial circumstance with relation to you or your build have changes.

Mortgage lending has carried on throughout the crisis, but circumstances such as valuations and furloughed salaries may have an impact on some new lending agreements. Always check with your lender, broker or financial specialist, and ensure they have experience of custom and self build. The unwillingness of some parties to do site visits during the crisis has acted as a limiting factor on some activity, but NaCSBA believes such visits can be undertaken within best practice guidance or alternative remote approaches adopted.

Equally, be prepared for delays from departments such as Land Registry, which may have backlogs of work as people work from home.

Small companies may also be eligible from the [100% Government-backed Bounce Back loans](#), of between £2,000 to £50,000, with the scheme remaining open until 31 March 2021.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

You should update your work practices and update your processes for Health and Safety to follow the latest [Health and Safety Executive](#) and the Construction Leadership Council's [Site Operating Procedures](#) (always check this is the latest version).

A clean and tidy site will reduce the risk of accidents, as hospital visits following an accident are a risk in themselves. However, if an accident does occur hospitals should not be avoided because of the risk if the injury is serious enough to warrant a visit.

SAFETY ON SITE

You should conduct your own risk assessment and be sure that you are meeting the expectations for safe operation. If you are the site owner or as the main contractor the responsibility will sit with you for the safety of anyone on site, whether employees, visitors or family members. Limit all but necessary visits to site, too.

SAFE DISTANCING Advice remains that workers (who are not from the same household) should maintain a two-metre distance, and where possible PPE should be worn. Any jobs that make this impossible, such as awkward lifting, should be carefully planned to minimise time for close working, and workers should be wearing PPE as a precaution. Safe distancing around deliveries should also be practised as standard.

PPE Risk assessments for work on site should be undertaken and the work delayed if it cannot be carried out safely without PPE, should PPE be unavailable.

TRAVEL Teams of workers should not share transport (unless they are in the same household/bubble), with workers arriving independently and avoiding public transport.

STAGGERED TIMINGS Given the longer days, measures that can support safe working include staggered start times, lunches and breaks, with – where practical, multiple kitchen and toilet facilities. There should ideally be several washing points fully supplied with appropriate cleaning and sanitisers.

SET EXPECTATIONS You should establish with your workforce in advance how this will work in practice on your site. The FMB recommends daily briefings (that reflect safe distance measures) with expectations around new work processes and practices. It may help to share this PDF guide.

A zero tolerance approach to lax behaviour should be practised, with a process put in place for notification of breaches and also for any workers starting to develop symptoms, with record keeping in place.

CLEANING Hotspots should be regularly disinfected, with a person appointed to do this job and a log of cleaning. These include entry points, handles, equipment handles and controls, ladders, taps and toilets. Tools should not be shared and should be sanitised after use.

CLOTHING clothing should be washed after use, ideally loaded directly into the washing machine by the user, if possible.

SHARED EQUIPMENT tablets, devices, plans and anything that is shared represents a transmission risk and should be avoided.

ONLINE SECURITY

The Coronavirus is a rich opportunity for scammers operating cyber crime and phishing scams, with worried people clicking on links to ensure they get the correct information. As with all cyber crime, think before opening emails or attachments from unusual sources or addresses that don't quite look right. If it is from your bank or another professional organisation and looks suspicious check its safe - by looking on the relevant website rather than following links.

The National Cyber Security Centre has advice on avoiding [Phishing and other email scams](#) and also on [malware and ransomware attacks](#). Other good sources of advice are the [National Crime Agency](#) and police forces, such as the [Metropolitan Police](#).

REPORTING ILLNESS

If anyone develops symptoms you must follow protocol and ensure that work is stopped, safely, and secured. You must report anyone that develops symptoms at work to the [HSE under RIDDOR, using the online guidance](#). A risk assessment should then be completed about the situation on site, and any workers isolating should [follow guidelines](#).

Keep a log of all activity, including securely handled tracing information, and ensure that any consequences of delaying or halting work are relayed along the chain to all involved.

WORKING IN A HOME WITH RESIDENTS

In most cases with a self build or custom build, the owner and their family will not be in residence on site. However, if this not the case the Government has detailed guidance for precautions you should take for [carrying out work inside people's homes](#).

This is most likely to apply if homeowners in temporary accommodation on site look to move into a property before all final work is completed, but all insurances should be checked before owners consider this as an option, and current Government advice remains for people not to move house if they can avoid it.

PLANNING AND NATIONAL DIFFERENCES

ARE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITIES STILL OPERATING?

Yes, most are still operating planning services, but individual arrangements are in place for contact, either by phone, email or email for a call back. Check the situation with regards to your authority's attitude to site visits for planning and building control.

WHAT ARE THE OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE UK DOING?

Check the latest status, for [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#), as rules and restriction vary accordingly due to devolution.

DISCLAIMER

NaCSBA is providing this information as general guidance only, and in no way is it a definitive or legally binding. Official advice is routinely updated and any decision makers must be confident that the decisions they make about returning to work are robust and reflect the latest Government and industry guidance. Therefore, it is also recommended that any plans include regular reviews for safe work practices.