Safely Re-opening your office after Lockdown

After months of lockdown many offices are starting to re-open but the process requires careful planning. There is detailed guidance from the Government, which can be found at https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/offices-and-contact-centres

Our checklist is here to assist you with your planning and provide some useful pointers:

General Risk Management	Check
Review all work activities to see if they are safe or how they can be made safe; a risk assessment template is a useful tool for this. If you cannot carry out an activity safely it should not be undertaken at all	
Consult with employees regarding the risk assessment, share the details and train them in the revised working procedures	
Make sure employees understand social distancing rules, hygiene and why it is relevant	
Make sure visitors clearly understand the rules through the use of signage, floor markings, announcements, etc. and reassure them with explanations of the safety steps you are taking	
Have a plan in place to deal with employees and members of the public who do not comply with your rules	
It is good practice to have your assessment, policies and procedures recorded in writing	
Keep up to date with the changing guidelines and government announcements	
Employees	**Check**
Consult with employees to see who is able to return to work, considering things like transport, childcare, health issues, disability, etc. If they can continue working from home do they need to come in?	
Consider staggered arrival times for staff, how they are travelling and how they will enter the premises	
Ensure suitable washing and sanitising facilities are available on arrival and at regular intervals during the day	
If required, provide suitable and appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) such as face masks, gloves and screens	
Be aware of employee anxiety over return to work: Talk through anxieties and signpost to support services. Take HR advice if there is a potential conflict	
Ensure employees are aware of the symptoms of Covid-19 and understand what to do if they or someone they are in contact with experiences them	
Cleaning	**Check**
Will cleaning be done by employees or external contractors?	
Ensure adequate and appropriate cleaning materials and protective equipment are available	
Put a plan in place for regular cleaning of surfaces, paying particular attention to frequently touched items: door handles, phones, card machines, printers, keyboards, kettles, toilets, light switches, etc	
Ensure waste is disposed of safely	
Premises management before you re-open	**Check**
If water systems have been drained, they should be gradually refilled, checking for leaks. Before you re-open you should run hot and cold water systems for about 15 minutes to clear any water that may have been standing for many weeks	
Check the premises for damage, security and maintenance issues	
Test the fire & security systems and emergency lighting. Ensure that keyholder details are up to date and held by your alarm monitoring centre	
Fire suppression and sprinkler systems should be tested in line with installer's recommendations	

	Check
Some of your equipment may have gone past its inspection date – lifts, fire extinguishers, portable appliances, etc	
Ducting and extraction systems should be cleaned in line with recommended maintenance procedures	
Where building services, such as air conditioning and boilers, have been shut down they should be reinstated by qualified individuals following OEM procedures	
Check that your suppliers are operational and able to fulfil your requirements	
If practical, consider enforcing a separate entrance and exit to your premises and introducing a one-way system within the building	
Think about how First Aid procedures might be impacted and review fire and emergency procedures	
Liaise with neighbouring businesses regarding topics of common interest such as: parking, waste removal, elevators, stairwells, etc	
Premises management when you open	**Check**
Consider eliminating or reducing contact with items like paper files, cash, photocopiers, etc	
How will movement in confined spaces such as stairwells, lifts & corridors be controlled?	
Can appointments, meetings & visitors continue to be handled remotely?	
How will visitors be admitted and movement controlled? Will there be an appointment or queuing system?	
How will rules be communicated to visitors?	
Do you need to provide cleaning, sanitizing and PPE facilities for visitors?	
Look at the best way to ventilate the premises, hold conversations outside where possible	
Stagger break times and put measures in place to assist social distancing and hygiene in common areas such as toilets and kitchens	
What rules will you have regarding eating and drinking and the use of kitchen facilities & equipment?	
Review staff activities and locations to reduce close and face-to-face working; side-by-side or back-to-back is better than face-to-face	
Allocate tasks and roles to minimise touching of the same objects	
Limit movement of staff and restrict unnecessary contact between colleagues	
Consider where staff can leave coats, bags and personal items	

More comprehensive and regularly updated information can be found at https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus as well as information specific to health and safety at https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/coronavirus.htm

You should also remember that various existing regulations, such as the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974, Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and Workplace (Health, Safety & Welfare) Regulations 1992, remain in force so employee and public safety must remain a priority.

For advice or assistance on risk management or your insurance please contact our team on 01905 21681 or email us.

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