

Construction Activities and COVID Restrictions (2 February 2021, No.41)

Following the announcement of Scotland entering a new series of COVID-related restrictions in January, there have been ongoing discussions with all our affiliated trade unions regarding the work activities we are undertaking and how these are being achieved in a safe manner.

I would like to clarify the reasons why Tayside Contracts are continuing to carry out certain Construction activities, during the current phase of COVID restrictions.

Why are we continuing to undertake outdoor construction works?

The simple answer to this is that the work our team in the Construction Division does protects the people of Tayside, and we are immensely proud of - and grateful to - our people in Tayside Contracts for carrying out this vital work, when many others remain home, under COVID restrictions.

For example if we don't maintain our roads, the carriageways and footways deteriorate to become a danger to road users and pedestrians; if we don't maintain street lighting, people are less safe, especially during these darker winter nights; If we don't respond to winter conditions, the accident risks to the public are even greater; if we don't empty gullies, there is a risk they would be blocked if there is a flood situation, and surface water could freeze, becoming a hazard to pedestrians and road users; and we need our Transport team to maintain the vital vehicles and equipment to carry out all these other essential activities.

It has been suggested that as the country is in 'lockdown' we should not be doing this work. The fact is the Scottish Government sets out in law and guidance which industries should be stopped. They have not stopped essential industries such as outdoor construction, manufacturing, emergency services and social care. Therefore, we have checked - and rechecked - that the **outdoor construction work we do is fully consistent with national legislation, government guidance, NHS Public Health advice and meets industry standards** - and, as highlighted above, it keeps the communities of Tayside safe.

I assure you we are not treating this as 'business as usual'. We have reviewed work activities that we have been requested by the Councils in Tayside to undertake, to ensure these are appropriate for the current restrictions. This is ongoing and we are regularly engaging with the Councils to establish if there are alternative approaches that can help reduce the risk - for example the use of different materials that don't require the same number of employees to undertake the work.

Your safety is vitally important. We fully recognise that our people are working in very difficult circumstances, and our expert Health & Safety team have worked tirelessly with colleagues, and all trade unions, to ensure we have a comprehensive set of risk assessments, and safe systems of work, fully updated to cover latest Government guidance, to ensure your safety when carrying out your essential public services. We also work very closely with the clinical experts in NHS Tayside Public Health in making sure our people in Tayside Contracts are kept safe, and we have updated our risk assessments to take their advice into account.

Sharing Vehicles

We are aware of the risk to employees regarding the sharing of vehicles and have considered these risks fully. We have updated risk assessments for this activity, based on the advice of our expert Health & Safety team, and taking into account Government guidance and the professional clinical advice from NHS Tayside Public Health. On the basis of this expert guidance, we have determined that colleagues can continue to share vehicles in a safe manner, so long as you follow the precautions set out in the risk assessments and safe systems of work. Other essential public services are sharing vehicles, such as Police, Fire, and Ambulance. If this activity is unsafe, they would not be allowed to do this.

If you have concerns about sharing a vehicle, please speak to your line manager. We have worked very positively with the Trade Unions during the pandemic and share their commitment to ensure that your safety is top priority. In some cases, we may disagree on some details, but please be assured we base our actions on Government guidance, national NHS guidance, our professional Health & Safety Officers, and the clinical expertise of our colleagues in NHS Tayside Public Health.

Our approach to delivering the service during these very challenging times has centred around working closely together, with our decisions based on legislation, and the best possible expert guidance and information made available to us. **We are always open to consider any evidence or expert opinion that we are made aware of, which varies from the national guidance and professional opinion we are currently working to.**

Conclusion

Please stay safe and follow the Health & Safety arrangements for your work activity, to protect you and those near to you. If you have any concerns, please speak to your manager or a colleague from the Human Resources team. We would be happy to help you at this incredibly difficult time.

Keith McNamara

Managing Director