

Coronavirus, COVID-19: Cleaning Methods for MHE and Plant

■ What we know about the hazards associated with the task

It is very important to differentiate between cleaning equipment in regular use where there is no evidence of coronavirus (COVID-19) contamination and instances where there is a high risk that work equipment or environments have been contaminated by a person with confirmed or suspected coronavirus. In the latter situation, a formal assessment of all risks must be undertaken and the UK Government guidance on “COVID-19: cleaning in non-healthcare settings” should be applied.

COVID-19: cleaning in non-healthcare settings

The following advice is provided for materials handling equipment in regular use where there is no formal identification of contamination by the coronavirus.

■ Means of transmission

As this is a relatively new virus, we are still learning the full extent of how COVID-19 spreads from person to person. What we know so far is that the virus is present in the saliva or cough droplets of an infected person and that minute particles of the virus can therefore be spread from person to person when coughing or even when speaking normally. Similarly, droplets can contaminate surfaces either through direct contact with the surface or through being spread by hand where someone already has virus particles on their hands. In addition to Social Distancing measures, common contact points on work equipment and in work environments are therefore an area of concern.

It is not yet clear at what point there is no risk, however, studies of other viruses in the same family suggest that, in most circumstances at normal ambient temperatures, the risk is likely to be reduced significantly after 72 hours.

■ Routes of entry

The current understanding is that the virus enters the body through the eyes, nose & mouth, hence the correct application of Social Distancing, personal hygiene and PPE is essential to preventing the spread of the virus. In so far as is possible, people should avoid touching their face, eyes, nose or mouth.

■ Social Contact

Face-to-face contact, along with any physical contact should be avoided wherever possible. Correct Social Distancing in accordance with current Government guidance should be maintained wherever possible. At the time of publication, the UK Government guidance was a minimum separation distance of 2 m (6 feet).

- Site access procedures for visiting technicians must comply with this requirement.
- Transfer risk through shared contact surfaces must be avoided, for instance, do not share pens.
- Where practical, physical barriers such as cones and tape can assist in keeping the work area clear of other people.
- Engineers who use a Phone, PDA or other Electronic Device to complete their job sheet should not have this signed or handled by customers.

In any situation where Safe Social Distancing cannot be maintained a simple face covering, similar to a surgical mask, which covers the nose and mouth, should be worn. The use of face coverings should not replace social distancing where distancing is possible, and the following additional personal hygiene measures are required:

- Wash hands thoroughly before fitting and after removing the face covering
- Launder daily
- Change the face covering if it becomes damp

In addition, where safe social distancing cannot be ensured, the following controls should be considered:

- Consider screens or barriers to separate people
- Keep the activity as short as possible
- Use back to back or side to side working (rather than face to face) whenever possible
- Use fixed teams to minimise the number of contacts between different groups

■ Minimum PPE

Due to identified routes of entry, workwear should be laundered at regular intervals. PPE should include disposable single-use gloves and safety glasses, as well as overalls. It is also vitally important to provide facilities so that employees and visitors to any sites can regularly wash their hands with soap and water and dry them on a single use towels or using alcohol gel hand sanitiser. Hand washing should be for the recommended 20-second duration and be carried out both before starting and after completing the required work, even if gloves have been worn.

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■ Personal Hygiene

- Washing hands frequently with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitiser kills viruses which may be on the hands.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Follow sensible respiratory hygiene, for example:
 - Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing,
 - Use tissues and throw them away after single use.
 - Wash your hands or use a hand sanitizer every time you touch your mouth or nose.
- If you feel at all unwell or display any symptoms of COVID-19 infection – for example a persistent cough, fever, loss of sense of taste or smell, or shortness of breath – you must stay at home and self-isolate for the recommended period. Similarly, if anyone in your household develops these symptoms you must also self-isolate following the government’s advice for the prescribed period.
- Stay informed on the latest developments about COVID-19 by visiting the [Public Health England website](#)

■ Cleaning Products

- Always follow the instructions provided with the cleaning product.
- It is a sensible additional precaution to use disinfectant wipes or a combination of a disinfectant spray administered to a paper towel to assist with cleaning down the contact surfaces of trucks before and after work. Use of a direct spray may disperse germs from the surface into the air.
- Reusable cloths may transfer the virus between surface and should be washed thoroughly in hot soapy water between each use.
- The government advice states that normal household products such as bleach are appropriate for preventing the spread of germs, but it is recommended that a suitable commercial product is sourced for the cleaning of equipment such as a Fork Lift Truck operator’s compartment.
- Government advice is that usual cleaning products should be used, however, compatibility with the contact surfaces should always be checked prior to use.

■ Safe working practice

It should be noted that any cleaning undertaken should not introduce additional hazards such as:

- Slippery or wet surfaces.
- Alcohol-based products being used on hot surfaces or possible ignition sources.

- Harmful vapours in confined spaces such as truck cabins.
- Damage to electrical systems and controls due to fluid ingress.
- Ideally a COSHH risk assessment should be undertaken to ensure the appropriate control measures are in place.

■ Example of surfaces that should be wiped clean

The following contact surfaces should be cleaned between shifts, at each change of operator, and before commencing and after completion of maintenance activities:

- Steering Wheel
- Control Switches & Levers
- Touch sensitive display screens
- Grab handles
- Seat belts
- Dashboards & shared chassis areas
- Floor mats, where applicable
- Access covers, e.g. battery change, fuel cap

Before applying cleaning products always refer to the truck's operator's manual. Remember, information provided by the equipment manufacturer takes precedence over this document.

■ Fork Lift Trucks; other surfaces

Unless a specific risk has been identified, special cleaning measures for surfaces which are not normally touched more frequently than every 72 hours are not required.

Cleaning of specialist items, such as batteries and chains, should only be carried out in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations.

■ Waste

Waste cleaning materials should be removed from the work area after cleaning has been carried out and no later than at the end of the working shift.

The UK Government advice provides detailed recommendations for the disposal of possibly contaminated waste and recommends that where there is a risk that waste is contaminated, it should be sealed in a plastic bag which should then be sealed in a second plastic bag and stored securely away from communal waste areas for at least 72 hours (3 days) before it can be disposed of following normal waste management procedures.

Where there is no specific identified risk, and cleaning has been carried out as a routine precautionary measure, waste can be disposed of following normal waste management procedures. However, where possible, sealing waste in plastic bags will minimise risk.

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