

Conducting Fire Evacuation Drills During COVID-19

The LFB have issued some excellent guidance on how best to manage risks and prioritise works on buildings that are re-opening. This guidance has been ratified by the NFCC. For more information please see COVID-19 Returning to Work - LFB Guidance

[https://cdn.metro-safety.co.uk/images/COVID-19/Returning to Work - Covid-19 - Fire safety matters.pdf](https://cdn.metro-safety.co.uk/images/COVID-19/Returning_to_Work_-_Covid-19_-_Fire_safety_matters.pdf)

Metro Safety are conscious that employers, building owners and managers will be keen to do all that they can to restrict the potential spread of COVID-19 amongst their staff, employees and tenants, and that moving building occupants on mass as part of a practice evacuation exercise presents an unnecessary risk of person-to-person infection.

We have therefore incorporated elements of 'social distancing control' into the practice evacuation procedures to prevent, so far as is reasonably practical, unnecessary risk of person-to-person infection.

The following procedures are intended to facilitate limited evacuation exercises. Thereby familiarising new starters with the procedures and providing refresher training to key personnel. These exercises form an integral part of your fire safety training and procedures, but they must be supported by supplementary briefings and training for those who are exempted from the exercises. This is particularly important given the change in working practices that many people are adopting in response to Covid-19 control measures.

PLEASE NOTE: If you have implemented any changes to your working practices which are likely to impact on the building's emergency evacuation procedures, please ensure that we are advised of them at least two working days before the planned date of any evacuation drill exercise.

Interim Evacuation Procedures

On their return to work, and prior to the drill taking place, all staff should be instructed on the actions to take in the event of fire and a fire alarm activation.

Any changes to working practices that might impact on the evacuation procedures should be notified to Metro Safety.

All building occupants/tenants should be advised of the date and time of the drill.

Only fire wardens, new members of staff, and staff who have relocated to the building and who have not previously participated in a drill in the building, should be asked to respond to the alarm as they normally would.

In addition, it would be advisable to have at least some supervisors or team leaders, who would take a lead in any evacuation to also participate.

People with mobility restrictions who are subject to a PEEP should not participate in the drill, but

should be provided with appropriate supplementary training and instruction. Contractors and visitors should be advised of the drill. Both should remain with their hosts during the exercise, or report to their host at the assembly point if they are working remotely from them or if their host leaves the building during the drill

All other staff members should stay at their workplace.

Drill Commencement

The drill will be initiated by three short activations of the fire alarm. The alarms sound for a second and then silence. This will be repeated twice more so that the alarm sounds three times, for one or two seconds each time, with a one or two second gap between activations. A continuous alarm should be treated as a genuine fire alarm activation and everyone should leave the building.

Fire Warden Responsibilities

Prior to the exercise commencing the fire wardens should:

- Confirm that all exit doors from their demise are accessible, unobstructed and can be opened in a single action without the aid of a key, card or fob.
- Confirm that all fire alarm call points and fire extinguishers are clear and unobstructed.
- The above points should be checked on a daily basis in any case.
- Confirm whether any colleagues present in the building have a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) and if they are, that all persons referred to in the plan understand their role.
- Confirm that all staff, visitors and contractors who are not exempted from the exercise leave their place of work and evacuate the building, preferably via a designated escape route as opposed to the normal access routes.
- Remind persons evacuating to maintain social distancing practices
- Leave their place of work via an escape route other than the normal means of access and egress where these are available.
Where disabled refuge communication systems are installed in the building. Test at least one comms unit to ensure that the system is working and that the call is answered.
- Report to the assembly point.

Assembly Marshal Responsibilities

Upon activation of the fire alarm the assembly marshal should:

- Report to the assembly point
- Confirm that all fire wardens from all floors/demises have reported in
- Remind people to maintain social distancing
- On completion of the roll call, advise the evacuation drill observer of rollcall status

Debriefing

Wherever possible the exercise debrief will be conducted outside.

If this is not practical and there is nowhere available inside the premises which is large enough to maintain two metres distancing between participants, the drill observer will prepare a written debrief note. This will be emailed to the assembly marshal for them to distribute to all the fire wardens.