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Sally Hayns

Our ref: TO2020/08658

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Dear Sally,

Thank you for contacting us requesting clarification on how coronavirus guidance relates to ecological and environmental professionals. I hope this letter can provide clarity and assurance to your members in this uncertain time.

During this time of unprecedented disruption, the UK Government is not asking all businesses to shut, indeed it is important for business to carry on. As set out in guidelines updated on 7 April, available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19>

- Businesses and workplaces should make every possible effort to enable working from home as a first option. Where working from home is not possible, workplaces should make every effort to comply with the social distancing guidelines set out by the Government.
- Members of staff who are vulnerable or extremely vulnerable, as well as individuals whom they live with, should be supported as they follow the recommendations set out in guidance on social distancing and shielding respectively.
- Where the social distancing guidelines cannot be followed in full in relation to a particular activity, businesses should consider whether that activity needs to continue for the business to operate, and, if so, take all the mitigating actions possible to reduce the risk of transmission between their staff.
- Staff who are unwell with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) should not travel to or attend the workplace.
- Staff may be feeling anxious about coming to work and also about impacts on livelihood. Workplaces should ensure staff are fully briefed and appropriately supported at this time.
- Any member of staff who develops symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) (a new, continuous cough and/or a high temperature) should be sent home and stay at home for seven days from onset of symptoms. If the member of staff lives in a household where someone else is unwell with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) then they must stay at home in line with the stay at home guidance.
- Employees will need your support to adhere to the recommendation to stay at home to reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) to others.

- Employees should be reminded to wash their hands for 20 seconds more frequently and catch coughs and sneezes in tissues.
- Frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, using your standard cleaning products.
- Those who follow advice to stay at home will be eligible for statutory sick pay (SSP) from the first day of their absence from work.
- Employers should use their discretion concerning the need for medical evidence for certification for employees who are unwell. This will allow GPs to focus on their patients.
- If evidence is required by an employer, those with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) can get an isolation note from NHS 111 online, and those who live with someone that has symptoms can get a note from the NHS website.

Ecologists and environmental professionals should therefore be able to continue with outdoor work, including ecological surveying and supervision, where they can continue to follow Public Health England guidelines. Detailed advice for outdoor work can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/social-distancing-in-the-workplace-during-coronavirus-covid-19-sector-guidance#outdoor-businesses>. Work that does not require travel, such as desk-based surveys and report writing, should be completed from home where possible.

We recognise that the cessation of environmental survey works would risk causing later delays in the development sector. We would like to thank CIEEM and other environmental professional associations for offering advice to help their members adhere to Government guidelines whilst going about their important work.

We hope that you can similarly help your members and the industry to access the range of employment, financial support and business support measures that are being made available by HM Treasury. Please see GOV.UK and www.businesssupport.gov.uk/fags/ for further information.

We face an unprecedented challenge, and the Government is working as fast as we can to address the issues created by coronavirus. I hope that the measures we are introducing, and guidance we will continue to provide, can deliver greater certainty in this uncertain time.

Yours sincerely,

Kevin Woodhouse
Ministerial Contact Unit