

Guidance for Scaffolding Operations During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic

Issue 1 – 20 April 2020



INTRODUCTION

The UK Government has stated that the construction industry is making a hugely valued and critical contribution to the resilience of the nation and assisting the economy during the current coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic.

To ensure compliance with the World Health Organisation and UK Government health advice, sites need to comply with the Site Operating Procedures (SOP) document, which has been developed and published by the Construction Leadership Council.

The health and safety requirements of any construction activity must not be compromised at this time. If an activity cannot be undertaken safely, due to a lack of suitable protective measures being implemented, it should not take place. It is the duty of scaffolding contractors to assess all risks and satisfy themselves that suitable controls are in place before choosing to return to work.

It is recognised that whether through choice or because it will not be possible to maintain the requirements of the Site Operating Procedures (SOP) many sites are closing or will close temporarily. However, where work continues, it is vital that an environment is provided in which our employees can safely operate.

The primary objective of this guidance is to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of our workforce and has been produced to assist the scaffolding industry in complying with the current safety guidelines.

Government and industry guidelines are currently changing frequently to reflect new information about the virus and how it is transmitted. This guidance will therefore be under ongoing review and updates published as appropriate. For the same reason, this document should also be used in conjunction with the latest edition of the SOP, '*Site Operating Procedures – Protecting Your Workforce*'.

This document is based on Public Health England (PHE) guidance. Other restrictions and advice may be applied in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and must be complied with by companies operating within these regions.

SOCIAL DISTANCING

Social distancing rules are a series of measures, set by the UK Government, which should be implemented to reduce social interaction between people in order to help reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19).

A key safeguard included within the social distancing rules is to maintain a distance of at least 2.0m (6'-6") from other people where possible. This has been adopted as a fundamental protective measure within this guidance.

Where it is not possible to follow the social distancing guidelines in full in relation to a particular activity, it should be considered whether that activity needs to continue for the site to continue to operate, and, if so, all the mitigating actions possible should be taken to reduce the risk of transmission.

These may include:-

- Minimising the frequency and time workers are within 2.0m of each other.
- Minimising the number of workers involved in these tasks.
- Workers being positioned side by side or facing away from each other, rather than face-to-face.

SELF ISOLATION

All employees should be advised that anyone who meets one or more of the following criteria should not travel to work:-

- High temperature.
- Persistent cough.
- Vulnerable person (e.g. persons over 70 or with an underlying health condition such as a respiratory disease e.g. mild asthma or a weakened immune system or is pregnant).
- Living with someone else who is showing symptoms of the COVID-19. If so, they should stay away from work for 14 days from the first day of illness. (See below).

Anyone who develops a high temperature or a persistent cough must stay at home until the symptoms have ended, and in all cases for at least seven days. Everyone else in the household must stay at home for at least 14 days after the first person's symptoms appear, even if they themselves do not have symptoms. If anyone else develops symptoms during that time, that individual must stay home for an additional seven days from when they developed symptoms. Once seven days have passed and provided symptoms have ended, they no longer need to isolate.

If working on domestic or healthcare premises where a person or persons are self-isolating or shielding It is prohibited to enter the building or come within 2.0m of them. It is advisable to notify the household or healthcare providers of the work taking place and to enquire if anyone is self-isolating or shielding prior to attending site.

PROCEDURE IF SOMEONE FALLS ILL

If a worker develops a high temperature or a persistent cough whilst at work, they should:-

- Maintain the 2.0m social distancing rule at all times.
- Notify their supervisor or line manager.
- Return home immediately.
- Avoid touching anything.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue and put into a bin. If they do not have tissues they should cough or sneeze into the crook of their elbow.
- Seek guidance from NHS 111 online. (Only if they cannot gain access to this, should they phone 111).
- Call 999 if they have a serious or life-threatening emergency, and should tell the call adviser if you have coronavirus symptoms.
- NOT attend a GP surgery or public places, to help reduce the spread of the disease.

They must then follow the government guidance on self-isolation.

TRAVEL TO AND FROM SITE

Social distancing should be maintained wherever possible, but car or van sharing will generally not allow compliance with the 2.0m social distancing rule.

If operatives cannot travel alone and have no other option than to share a vehicle, current government and industry guidance advises:-

- Journeys should be shared with the same individuals each day and with the minimum number of people at any one time.
- They should avoid touching their face at all times.
- Good ventilation (i.e. keeping the windows open) and facing away from each other may help to reduce the risk of transmission.
- The vehicle (including private vehicles) should be cleaned regularly using gloves and standard cleaning products, with particular emphasis on handles and other areas where passengers may touch surfaces.
- On leaving the vehicle, all occupants should wash their hands with soap and water or use hand sanitiser for at least 20 seconds.

Public transport should be avoided if at all possible and an alternative form of transit adopted. e.g. cycling or walking if feasible.

The following points also need to be considered:-

- The provision of additional facilities for parking cars and bicycles on site.
- The provision of hand cleaning facilities at entrances and exits from sites/site establishments.
- Staggered start and finish times should be arranged to reduce congestion at entrances, exits and changing rooms etc.
- How someone taken ill would get home safely without coming into close contact with others.

When employees arrive home after work, they should change and wash before having any close contact with members of their household.

SITES AND SITE ESTABLISHMENTS

The responsibility for implementation and maintenance of protective measures contained within government and industry guidelines is generally the responsibility of the Principal Contractor (main contractor). These responsibilities may in some cases be delegated to individual contractors. It is the responsibility of individual contractors to work closely with Principal Contractors to ensure that suitable facilities exist to protect the workforce. If there are any concerns, they should be reported to the Principal Contractor, without delay.

All non-essential visitors should be prohibited from site until further notice.

A one-way pedestrian walkway system should be implemented where reasonably practicable, with clear signage and directional arrows displayed. Individuals are to ensure strict compliance with site pedestrian processes to maintain 2.0m social distancing rules.

Access points to site, site establishments, canteens, offices and welfare facilities should be regularly monitored to ensure that 2.0m social distancing is maintained at all times. Markings with tape or paint on floors or walls or the erection of barriers to enforce and assist, may also be required.

Employees are required to wash/clean their hands immediately upon entering and leaving the site. Additional wash facilities, hand sanitiser or bacterial wipes should be provided if necessary. (See 'Hand Washing' below).

Regular inspections of the facilities should be undertaken to ensure that hygiene levels are maintained to a high standard.

If work takes place where there are little or no on-site facilities, e.g. a highway or a remote location, scaffolding contractors should ask the client what facilities can be provided, in order that hygiene, welfare and other requirements of the SOP and this guidance can be complied with. (Refer to SG18 for further guidance).

Regular monitoring of all facilities to ensure ongoing compliance with this guidance should be implemented.

Delivery drivers should remain in their vehicles if the load will allow it. If needing to exit the cab, they must ensure that they are wearing appropriate PPE, adhere to hygiene requirements and maintain the 2.0m social distancing rules, whilst unloading goods and materials.

HAND WASHING

Regular and thorough hand washing, for at least 20 seconds (see **Figure 1**) with soap and water will help to protect against the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). If there is no immediate access to soap and water, hand sanitiser (with at least 60% alcohol content) may be used. It should however, be pointed out that hand sanitiser is not usually as effective as the use of soap and water. (See **Figure 1**).



Figure 1

All operatives should wash their hands using soap and water:-

- On entering and before leaving site.
- Before and after meals and breaks.
- Before and after using toilet facilities.
- Before and after entering offices, changing or meeting facilities.

The cleanliness and the effectiveness of hand washing/cleaning facilities should be efficiently maintained at all times. Regular checks of soap, fresh water, hand sanitiser and disposable hand towels should be made and replenished whenever necessary. Additional time, to allow for frequent hand washing and limiting access to facilities (see below) may be required.

Suitable and sufficient rubbish bins should be provided for hand towels, which should be emptied and the contents suitably disposed of as often as necessary, but at least daily.

TOILET FACILITIES

The number of people using toilet facilities at any one time may have to be restricted to ensure that social distancing rules are maintained. Employees should wash their hands immediately on entering and after using the facilities.

Enhanced cleaning regimes should be introduced and implemented more frequently throughout the day and at the end of the shift. Particular attention should be given to the regular cleaning of door handles, bolts and toilet flushes.

Portable toilets are not recommended, but where these exist, they should be thoroughly cleaned and emptied more frequently than usual.

CANTEENS AND EATING FACILITIES

The workforce should be encouraged to bring pre-prepared meals, which do not require heating and refillable drinking bottles from home. The workforce should also be required to stay on site once they have entered and should not be allowed to visit local shops.

Where there are no practical alternatives, workplace canteens may remain open to provide food, with appropriate adjustments for social distancing. Canteen staff should wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food. Canteens should provide a takeaway service providing pre-prepared and wrapped food only. Payments should be taken by contactless card wherever possible.

Whilst there is a requirement for construction sites to provide a means of heating food and making hot drinks, these are exceptional circumstances and where it is not possible to introduce a means of ensuring that the equipment is kept clean, the use of kettles, microwaves etc. must be prohibited.

- Sufficient refrigeration should be supplied to allow storage of foodstuffs for each person on site.
- Dedicated eating areas should be identified on site to reduce food waste and contamination.
- All personnel must wash their hands before entering dining areas.
- Crockery, eating utensils, cups etc. should not be used unless they are disposable.
- Workers should sit 2.0m apart from each other whilst eating and avoid close contact. This may require meal breaks to be staggered to reduce congestion and/or the size or number of facilities should be increased.
- The capacity of each canteen or rest area should be clearly identified at the entry to each facility, and where necessary attendants provided to supervise compliance with social distancing measures.
- Drinking water should be provided with enhanced cleaning measures introduced for taps and sinks.
- Tables should be cleaned after each use.
- All rubbish should be put straight in the bin and not left for someone else to clear up.
- All areas used for eating must be thoroughly cleaned at the end of each break, including chairs, door handles, kettles, microwaves and hard surfaces.

CHANGING FACILITIES, SHOWERS AND DRYING ROOMS

The maximum number of people who can use each facility at any one time in order to maintain the 2.0m distancing rules should be determined. To achieve maximum usage:-

- The size and number of facilities may be increased.
- Staggered start and finish times may be introduced to avoid congestion.
- The number of persons entering may have to be restricted (e.g. by using a welfare attendant).

Enhanced cleaning of all facilities should be introduced throughout the day and at the end of each shift. Suitable and sufficient rubbish bins should be provided throughout facilities, with regular removal and disposal of rubbish.

SITE CLEANING

Cleaning procedures should be enhanced across the site and site establishments, particularly in communal areas. A regular cleaning regime should be introduced, particularly in communal areas and at touch points including:-

- All door handles and push plates.
- Handrails on staircases and in corridors.
- Taps and washing facilities.
- Toilet flush handles.
- Lift and hoist controls.
- Machinery and equipment controls.
- Food preparation and eating areas including chairs, door handles, vending machines and payment devices.
- Telephone equipment, any shared mobile devices, keyboards, photocopiers and other office equipment.
- Shared tools.
- Plant, equipment and machinery controls.

The number of rubbish bins should be increased where necessary. Bins should be emptied and the contents suitably disposed of, as often as is necessary, but at least daily.

SITE MEETINGS

Only meetings which are vital to the safe and efficient running of the site should be held and only essential participants should attend. Where possible these should be 'virtual' meetings (held via Zoom or Skype etc). Where 'face-to-face' meetings are considered essential:-

- Seating must be arranged so that attendees can sit at least 2.0m apart.
- Rooms should be well ventilated, with windows open to allow fresh air circulation where possible.
- The duration of meetings should be as short as possible.
- Consideration should be given to holding them outside if feasible.

Where the attendance at meetings or job safety briefings needs to be recorded, participants should provide their own pens and signatures taken whilst still maintaining 2.0m social distancing, or an alternative 'distance compliant' means of logging attendees implemented.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

In addition to PPE selected for use in typical scaffolding operations, an assessment should be made to determine if additional equipment is required to provide protection against the hazards of coronavirus.

PPE, including respiratory protective equipment (RPE) must always be considered as a 'last resort', as any failure or incorrect use directly exposes the wearer to the hazard. Other controls, such as social distancing, enhanced cleaning and personal hygiene, must always be implemented and enforced in preference to reliance on PPE.

At the time of publishing, certain items of PPE and RPE (e.g. disposable coveralls, masks and eye protection) have been prioritised for supply to health care providers and patients and will not be generally available for some time. Provided that other controls, as mentioned above, have been implemented it should not be necessary to use RPE. However, if a previous risk assessment has indicated that a worker would be expected to wear respiratory protection as part of their normal job, then they should continue to do so.

Suitable gloves, which afford adequate hand protection for operatives, should be worn at all times when on site. They should be disposed of, in designated bins, at intervals deemed to ensure suitable protection or when showing signs of wear or damage, where skin may be exposed. To be effective gloves need to be used in conjunction with good hygiene measures, and good 'glove discipline'. For example, if an employee stops work to eat/drink/smoke, the basic process should be gloves off, wash hands thoroughly, eat/drink/smoke, wash hands again, put gloves back on.

Single-use PPE should be disposed of so that it cannot be re-used.

WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

Scaffolding teams should be as small as practicable. e.g. gangs of two allow for one operative to erect whilst the other is transferring materials, which may provide easier compliance with the 2.0m social distancing requirement.

For large/high structures gangs of three operatives may be more suitable, as one operative can remain at 'ground' level to transfer materials via a gin wheel. Also, a number of small teams may be utilised, provided they are allocated and remain in separately defined areas throughout the structure.

All work areas should be suitably barriered on all sides with high visibility tape or hard barricades and appropriately signposted to exclude third parties from the work zone and thus maintain social distancing requirements. Should it be noticed that unauthorised persons have entered the barriered zone, work should be suspended until they have left the area.

All work must be adequately supervised.

Companies have a responsibility to check that all health and safety measures, including the requirements within this procedure, are being appropriately implemented.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Prior to the commencement of any job, a suitable and sufficient risk assessment must be completed. (Refer to SG7 for further guidance). In addition to all prevailing hazards for scaffolding and associated operations, the assessment must specifically address all hazards related to coronavirus (COVID-19), especially with regard to maintaining the strict requirements for 2.0m social distancing and the requirements of the Site Operational Procedures (SOP). From this assessment a decision can be made as to whether safe working can be carried out.

Where it is not possible to follow the social distancing guidelines in relation to a particular activity, consideration needs to be given to whether that activity needs to continue for the site to continue to operate and if it does, all the mitigating actions should be taken, using the hierarchy of controls below and against any sector-specific guidance, to reduce the risk of transmission as low as is reasonably practicable (See **Figure 2**).

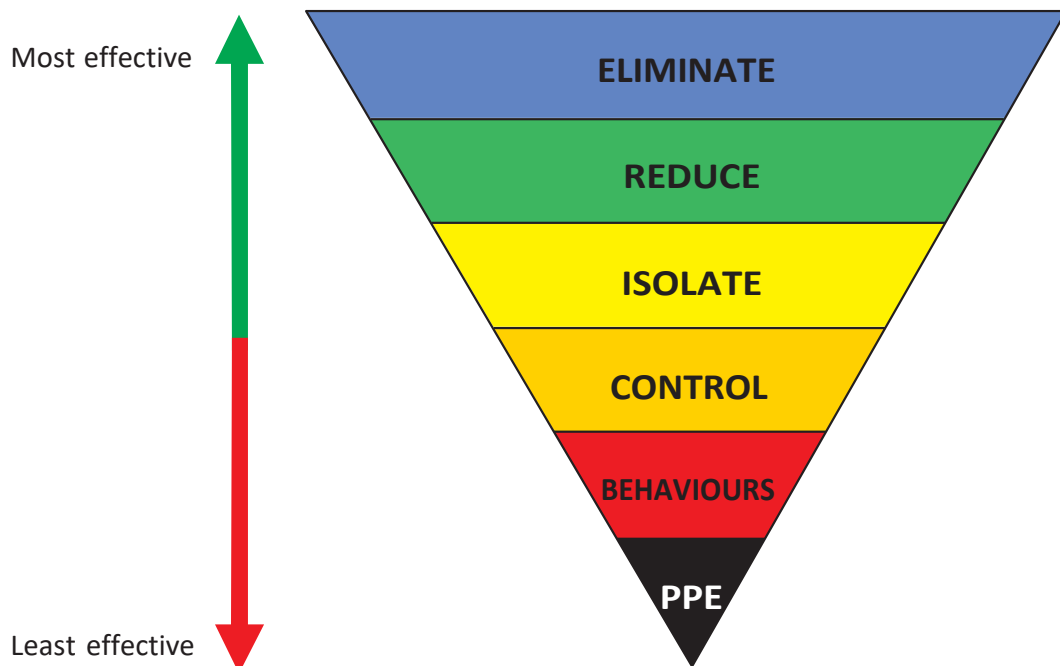


Figure 2

<i>Hierarchy</i>	<i>Typical Measures</i>
Eliminate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesign tasks to enable them to be done by one person. • Ensure stairs are used in preference to lifts. • Employ mechanical means to diminish worker interface.
Reduce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower worker capacity in lifts, toilets, eating and changing facilities. • Enhance personal hygiene, and cleaning regimes. • Increase ventilation in confined spaces. • Minimise interface time.
Isolate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separate individual gangs where possible. • Keep teams of workers together. e.g. (do not change gang members or persons who travel together). • Keep gangs as small as possible. • Allocate segregation bays between individuals and demarcate with barriers.
Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider introducing an enhanced authorisation process for these activities. • Provide additional supervision to monitor and manage compliance.
Behaviours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train, encourage and monitor to ensure everyone takes responsibility for their actions to minimise the risk of spread of infection.
PPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out a task specific risk assessment to determine suitable PPE to protect workers from the hazard.

Job safety briefings must be undertaken with small teams, in the open air where possible and 2.0m social distancing maintained throughout. If a large number of work teams are present, then additional briefings are to be provided to ensure that social distancing rules are maintained.

Sites should remind the workforce (e.g. at daily briefings) of the specific control measures necessary to protect them, their colleagues, families and the UK population.

It is the responsibility of all operatives to ensure that all protective and preventative measures specified within risk assessments are implemented and remain effective throughout the job. Should additional risks become apparent, or conditions change during the course of the work, the job must be immediately halted and re-assessed before recommencement.

Risk assessments should be reviewed as often as is necessary, and always immediately following any incident. They should be amended as required to ensure they are current. As site procedures and requirements for protection against coronavirus (COVID-19) can change regularly, risk assessments must be reviewed by the work team before the commencement of every shift to ensure that they are still valid.

LOADING AND UNLOADING OF MATERIALS

Where possible, materials should be loaded/unloaded from vehicles or in storage yards by forklift or crane. The transfer of materials around site should also be carried out by mechanical means where possible.

Manual handling of materials should only be undertaken if social distancing rules can be maintained.

The banding/unbanding of materials or the loading/unloading of bins should be carried out by one person at a time.

Operatives should not approach or congregate around material storage areas, bins or racks unless social distancing rules are maintained at all times.

All yard operations must follow the same health and safety requirements (including 2.0m minimum social distancing rules) as for work on site.

SCAFFOLDING OPERATIONS

Due to the closure of CISRS Training Providers and the suspension of HS&E tests, operatives are currently unable to renew their cards. CISRS and other industry recognised card schemes are calling on employers and those responsible for site access and card checking procedures to use their discretion towards workers whose cards have recently expired and allow them access to site until the current COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. This approach is supported by Build UK and the Unions.

All scaffolding work carried out at height should be conducted in strict compliance with the current edition of SG4 'Preventing Falls in Scaffolding Operations'.

An erection/dismantling schedule should be discussed and agreed with the Principal Contractor or the client to minimise any disruption to the programme.

Work should be planned so that there is no requirement for two persons to pass within 2.0m of each other on a scaffold lift or in a confined area on site.

Operatives should avoid work directly above or below each other as this arrangement does not afford the same protection as when positioned 2.0m apart horizontally.

Materials transferred vertically should be lifted or lowered by the use of gin wheels, handlines or mechanical means (such as goods hoists, transport platforms etc). (Refer to SG9 and SG26 for further guidance).

When lifting or lowering materials by means of gin wheels, operatives positioned on the ground must stand a safe distance away from the load so that they are out of the 'line of fire' of any potential dropped objects and that they maintain minimum social distancing requirements.

Materials may be transferred or relocated on the same level, or to the next lift above, by being placed in a convenient position by one operative, who then retreats to maintain at least a 2.0m social distance. A second operative may then approach the materials to pick them up and transfer them elsewhere within the work zone.

For scaffolds with a relatively small plan area (e.g. towers and small birdcages) only one operative should access each lift at any one time. (See **Figure 3**).

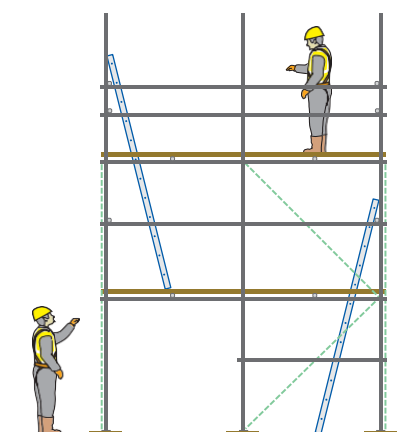


Figure 3

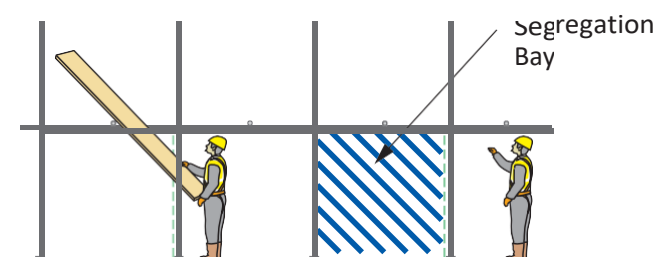


Figure 4

On long or wide structures, such as independents or birdcages or when positioned on the ground, operatives may work on the same level provided that they remain a minimum distance of one (2.0m) bay (i.e. a segregation bay) between each other at all times. (See **Figure 4**). Operatives must have full spatial awareness at all times to ensure that social distancing is maintained.

A safe system of work may then be arranged as follows:-

- Scaffolder A gains access to the next lift and positions himself at one end, near to the access ladder.
- Tubes and fittings are then transferred from below and stored on the lift.
- When placing materials, care must be taken not to overload a local area of the scaffold and to maintain a clear walkway in case of an emergency evacuation.
- Scaffolder A then commences fixing ledgers from that end of the scaffold (**Figure 5**).

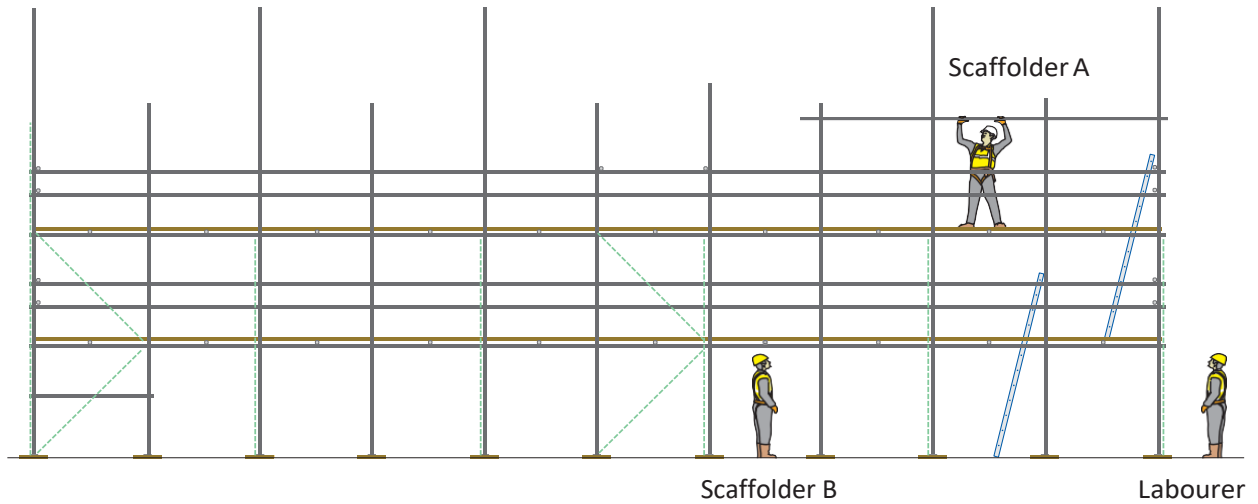


Figure 5

- Once Scaffolder A clear of the access point, Scaffolder B can then gain access to this lift.
- Scaffolder B then receives the remaining materials from the labourer below.
- Scaffolder B then follows behind Scaffolder A, fitting transoms and boards (**Figure 6**).

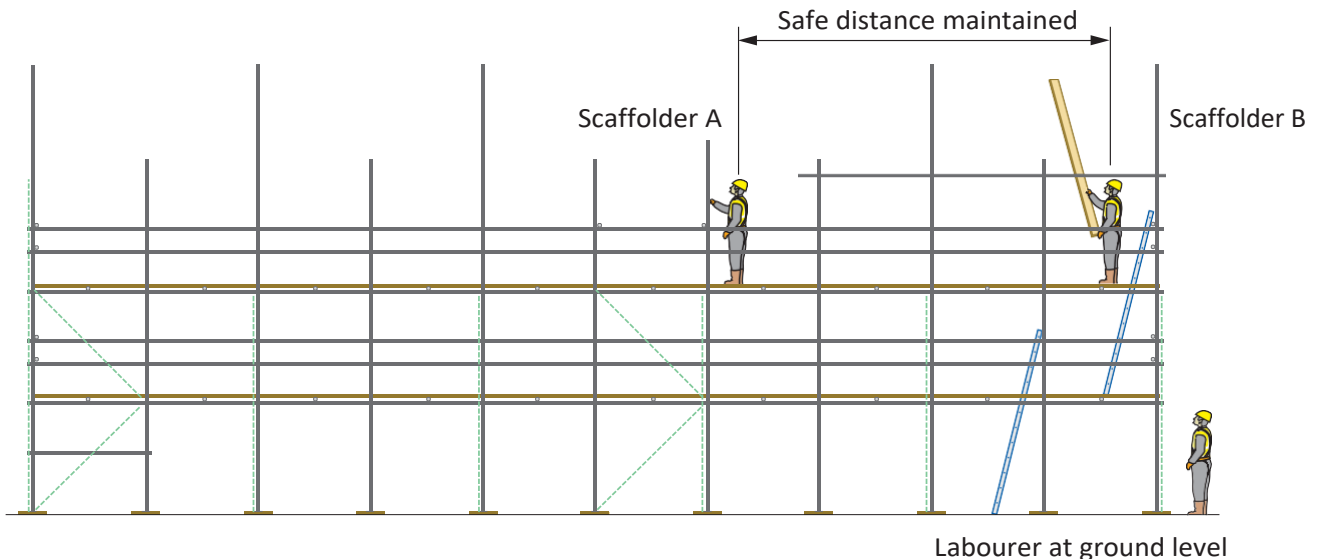


Figure 6

- Work then progresses in this way along the lift, with both scaffolders maintaining at least one 2.0m segregation bay between them at all times.
- Bracing, ties, advanced guardrails and ladders may be fitted by either or both scaffolders as work progresses along the lift, ensuring that at least one segregation bay remains between them at all times.
- When the lift is complete, one scaffolder gains access to the lift above (taking care not to pass each other in close proximity) and the process is then repeated to the full height of the scaffold.

Other safe systems of work may be devised to suit different working situations and different types of scaffolds, but these must always strive to facilitate the strict requirements of maintaining 2.0m social distancing at all times. Where this is not possible the task risk assessment must identify suitable controls using the 'hierarchy of controls identified above.

Before the scaffold is dismantled, the work sequence should be planned to ensure that all necessary safety precautions and social distancing rules are adopted.

EMERGENCY ARRANGEMENTS

In the event of a fire, gas release or similar site emergency, the priority will be to escape immediately to the muster point and remain there whilst maintaining the 2m social distancing rule with other personnel, as far as is reasonably practicable.

In the case of a serious injury, emergency services will continue to respond and should be contacted, if necessary. However, due to the current pressure on resources, response times may be affected. The prevention or re-scheduling of high-risk work or the provision of additional competent first aid or trauma resources should be considered.

For minor injuries, first aid may be self-administered by the injured person if possible (under direct instruction from a first aider) in order to maintain the 2.0m social distancing rule.

Where this is not possible the following precautions should be taken by the first aider at all times when treating an injured person:-

- Surgical gloves to be worn.
- Safety spectacles or face shields to be worn.
- Disposable aprons or coveralls to be worn.
- If the casualty is unresponsive and does not appear to be breathing, 'chest only' CPR should be undertaken.
- Hands and face must be thoroughly washed as soon as the treatment is completed.

It is absolutely essential to have a suitable rescue and recovery plan in place for any work involving fall arrest equipment. There are severe health risks associated with anyone who has fallen and remains suspended in a fall arrest harness. (Refer to SG19 for further guidance).

Should an operative accidentally fall and be suspended from his safety harness, it must always be considered as a medical emergency situation and rescue must be administered without delay.

During and immediately after the rescue operation, it may not be possible to maintain the 2.0m social distancing rules throughout, but life-saving procedures must take precedence. A suitable rescue procedure must therefore be in place and fully understood by all involved, before any work commences. Rescue techniques and the rescue equipment selected will depend upon the type and complexity of the scaffold structure.

Before starting any job, scaffolders must be fully aware of the emergency procedures, including the means of raising the alarm and alerting the rescue team. The method and means of effecting the rescue should always be detailed on the risk assessment.

REFERENCES, FURTHER READING AND GUIDANCE

Construction Sector - Site Operating Procedures – Protecting Your Workforce During Coronavirus (Covid-19) Revision 3.

Construction Leadership Council.

Guidance on Social Distancing in the Workplace.

Public Health England.

Social Distancing in the Workplace During Coronavirus (COVID-19): Sector Guidance.

UK Government.

COVID-19 and Waste Management Activities.

Waste Industry Safety and Health Forum.

SG4 Preventing Falls in Scaffolding Operations.

SG7 Risk Assessments and Method Statements (RAMS).

SG9 Use, Inspection and Maintenance of Lifting Equipment and Accessories for Lifting Scaffolding.

SG18 Welfare Facilities for the Scaffolding Contractor.

SG19 A Guide to Formulating a Rescue Plan.

SG26 Scaffolding and Hoists – Transporting Scaffolding in Construction Hoists.

SG30 Management of Road Haulage for the scaffolding Contractor.

SG37 Effective Supervision.

CG12 Contractual Clauses - Appendix 1 COVID-19 - Contractual Terms for Hire, Inspections, Labour and Returning to Work. (April 2020).

National Access and Scaffolding Confederation (NASC).

Further Guidance can be obtained from -

For details of the Construction Industry Scaffolders Record Scheme please visit - www.cisrs.org.uk

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