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## Developing a Ventilation Strategy to Support Your Employees' Return to Work

Preparing an office for safe re-occupation post-lockdown is about much more than opening the doors and turning on the lights.

**A key feature of any building is its ventilation and air conditioning systems, with adequate ventilation required to help reduce the risk of airborne viral transmission in enclosed areas.**

In order to make the workplace COVID-secure, duty holders should consider improving ventilation alongside other control measures to reduce the risks of viral transmission, such as social distancing, a thorough cleaning regime and frequent handwashing.

When developing the ventilation strategy for your building, it is critical that the operational characteristics of its ventilation and air conditioning systems are understood. There will also be a requirement to balance other needs against the use of ventilation, such as thermal comfort.

### Identifying poorly ventilated areas

As part of their COVID-19 risk

assessment, duty holders must identify areas of the workplace that tend to be occupied but are poorly ventilated. These should serve as the main focus when developing control measures that will improve ventilation and reduce the risk of aerosol transmission.

There are a number of simple ways to identify poorly ventilated areas on the premises:

- › Look for areas where there is no mechanical or natural ventilation, such as open windows, doors or vents etc
- › Check that mechanical systems provide outdoor air, temperature control, or both. If a system only recirculates air and has no outdoor air supply, the area is likely to be poorly ventilated

- › Identify areas that feel stuffy or have a bad smell
- › Employers may wish to use carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) monitors, as checking CO<sub>2</sub> levels will help to decide whether the ventilation is poor. However, these monitors are less effective in areas used by few people.

### Recommended actions

Facilities management is a vital function required to provide employees with a safe and efficient working environment. Before businesses can gradually return to normal, control measures must be implemented in order to protect the health of employees, customers and other third parties, while also ensuring that facilities are safe.

Recommended courses of action to improve ventilation in buildings could include:

- › Open windows wider than normal after a due consideration of any security issues (a walk around may be required to ensure that all windows that pose a security issue are closed before the building is vacated, with windows reopened as early as possible prior to reoccupation by the majority of the building users)
- › Implement extended operation times in buildings with mechanical ventilation systems
- › If the work area has both high and low-level windows or vents, both should be used to facilitate the tempering of the incoming air
- › If there is no obvious ventilation strategy in a room or area, building users should be discouraged from using these spaces
- › Encourage employees to modify clothing to reduce any potential discomfort arising from the implementation of the new ventilation strategy.

### How can SOCOTEC help?

SOCOTEC has a wide range of environmental, health, safety and welfare services to support estates and facilities managers in complying with a host of regulatory requirements, including:

- › Health and safety risk assessments tailored to COVID-19 guidance and requirements
- › [Health and safety audits](#) in relation to COVID-19
- › Occupational hygiene services such as [surface swabbing](#) to detect the presence of SARS-CoV-2
- › Advice on using your building's engineering controls.
- › [Legionella risk assessments](#), [water treatment equipment](#) and other water safety services
- › [COVID-secure and business ready solutions.](#)