

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 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.

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 new illness, we do not know exactly how coronavirus spreads from person to person. Similar viruses are spread in cough droplets hence the significant risk will be either from person to person or by transmission on common contact points such as high contact surfaces on shared work equipment & environments.

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, 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 PPE & personal hygiene 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.

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■ Social Contact

Face-to-face contact, along with any physical contact should be avoided wherever possible. Correct Social Distancing with a minimum separation of 2 m (6 feet) should be maintained.

- 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.

■ 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 the site can regularly wash their hands with soap and water and dry them on a single use towels, which should be disposed of safely. 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.

[gov.uk link](#)

■ Personal Hygiene

- Washing hands with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses which may be on the hands.
- Maintain social distancing of 2 metres (6 feet).
- 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 coronavirus – for example with a persistent cough, fever, or shortness of breath – you must stay at home and self-isolate for the recommended period.
- Stay informed on the latest developments about COVID-19 by visiting the [Public Health England website](#).

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■ 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.

At the time of writing, some commercial cleaning substances are in very short supply and it is beyond this advice sheet to make specific recommendations. The NHS 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.

■ Safe working practice

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

- Slippery or wet surfaces.
- Ignition sources caused by alcohol-based products.
- 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

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.

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

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■ 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

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.
