

COVID 19 Industry Guidance note for turbine and sub-station maintenance technicians and other key wind farm workers

Context

There is a growing concern among IWEA members about the implications for the work of turbine and sub-station technicians and key wind farm workers should greater restrictions on movement be imposed by the relevant authorities as part of the response to the Covid-19 virus.

If turbine and sub-station technicians and key wind farm workers are unable to resolve turbine faults or to carry out maintenance over a period of time there will start to be an increase in the number of turbines coming offline which poses a risk to Ireland's electricity supply. Over 30% of electricity generation in Ireland in 2019 was from wind power which is central to the security of Ireland's power system.

IWEA believes that turbine and sub-station technicians and key wind farm workers, as key essential workers, must be facilitated to access sites to carry out maintenance and repair to turbines and associated technology, and therefore must be considered frontline energy workers whose efforts are important to keeping the lights on during the Covid-19 crisis.

Guidance

IWEA has developed this guidance for these key personnel and is recommending adherence by all IWEA members.

This guidance is based on publicly available information and industry good practice as at 25th March 2020. Further government or health advice may supersede this guidance note. In the event of any conflicts, please default to national health guidance issued by the HSE or the Irish Government. Companies should be aware of any limitations on availability of emergency response personnel that may be notified in future by the HSE or National Ambulance Service.

Where teams are working across two different jurisdictions, we recommend using the more conservative guidance available.

General Requirements for Teams

- Technicians should check their personal health before leaving home. If technicians are showing with [symptoms of COVID 19](#) they should notify their employer, should not travel to work and begin self-isolation
- In the event of becoming symptomatic or having a suspected case, technicians should share this information with employers, site owners and other potentially affected personnel, and be fully transparent with any contact tracing measures required
- All personnel coming to site should provide a declaration stating their current health status re: COVID-19 (i.e. any symptoms) and any relevant details from previous fourteen days
- Where possible there should be limited physical interactions between different service colleagues
- It is advised to strictly limit the number of colleagues working with each other. Employers must risk assess local service team numbers in line with HSE guidance

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- It is recommended that when multiple teams are on site that working hours be staggered and nominated times for tooling and specified workplaces be allocated
- It is recommended to record when a location has been most recently visited and by whom. This responsibility falls with the Asset Manager and the OEM control room and should inform personnel of;
 1. Whether the location has been visited/entered in the previous 3 days
 2. Whether someone who visited has had or is suspected of having had the virus who entered within the past 72 hours and has self isolated
 3. State that the location has not been visited in past 72 hours

Vehicle

- Where possible personnel should travel to site independently of one another
- The same personnel should work in the same teams every day and the same service vehicles used by the same teams as far as reasonably practicable
- Where this cannot be achieved consider any other appropriate measures [and follow strict hygiene protocol from official sources](#)
- Regularly **disinfect** surfaces in vans (door handles, steering wheels, dash boards)

Service Centre

- Where possible, service teams should avoid visiting the Service Centre
- If critical for the collection of tools / materials, the time spent in the Service Centre should be minimised and / or staggered – Where possible tools and materials should be batched internally and issued rather than all personnel entering an enclosed space
- Personnel should consider scheduling visiting times or collections times at Service Centre
- While at a Service Centre, personnel should observe [physical distancing guidelines](#)
- Where possible, carry out any preparation works outside rather than inside the Service Centre to avoid spending too much time in an enclosed and shared environment

Turbine and Sub-station

- Hand sanitiser should be made available at entry points
- The first person to arrive at the turbine / sub-station should disinfect all door handles, light switches, handrails on stairs and another person should repeat this process when exiting
- While working in the turbine try to keep at least 1 meter (3 feet), ideally at least 2 meters (6 feet) apart in so far as practicable
- Where this cannot be achieved consider [any other appropriate measures and follow strict hygiene protocol at the end of the working period from official sources](#)
- It is advisable to wear gloves at all times while working and regularly dispose of / clean them where appropriate
- Personnel must wash hands on exiting place of work following [HSE guidance](#) or use hand sanitiser where water is unavailable

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Service Lift

- Technicians should avoid travelling in the service lift together and must ensure they maintain sufficient physical distancing at all times
- After use of the lift, all contact points within the service lift should be sprayed and / or wiped down with **disinfectant**, prior to use by a different technician

Hub / Nacelle Working

- Technicians should avoid working in the hub / nacelle together where possible
- Where this cannot be achieved consider any other appropriate measures [and follow strict hygiene protocol](#)
- For prolonged working in nacelle, covers should be opened (weather permitting) and / or access port to roof opened and door below left open to encourage flow of fresh air. Additional safety measures should be considered to take account of these openings

Lunch & breaks

- During lunch breaks personnel should maintain physical distancing rules
- Break periods should be staggered
- Restaurants and other public places should be avoided
- Canteen surfaces should be clear of all items so surfaces can be easily cleaned
- Personnel should bring their own lunch / drinks to site
- Personnel should clean up and disinfect area after use
- Wash any utensils in dishwasher or warm soapy water
- Personnel should wash hands using [HSE guidance](#) after lunch and breaks. If water is not available, hand sanitiser should be used

Paperwork / Computer Related Tasks

- All works not on the turbine or in the sub-station such as completion of reports, answering emails etc. should be completed at home where possible to avoid spending unnecessary time in the Service Centre

Training

- Physical training courses should be excluded unless adequate physical distancing can be implemented
- Personnel should assess whether training can be completed online
- For refreshers extension of time for validity should be requested or carried out via online training
- GWO has agreed to allow as a temporary measure until 1 June 2020 that:

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1. Course participants unable to refresh previous training within the 24 months validity period, are granted an option to take the planned refresher training up until 60 days after expiry
 2. Training Providers offering the refresher training to course participants under this exemption must contact GWO to receive further instructions
- Skills deterioration can mean trained skills are forgotten as they are not used during normal work (such as First Aid) or can mean gradual deviation from the correct and safe skills practices acquired during training, therefore companies should assess personnel competencies in relation to training certificate extensions
 - Please reference <https://www.globalwindsafety.org/> for up to date details

Statutory Inspections

- The HSA have [published advice for employers in respect to statutory examinations and testing on their website](#)
- There is currently no derogation in respect of the provisions of the Safety, Health & Welfare at Work Act 2005 or its associated statutory provisions at the present time
- However, the HSA recognises that employers, as a result of national measures to prevent the spread of COVID 19, may in certain circumstances, find it challenging to source the necessary competence to undertake such examinations. Notwithstanding any such difficulties, employers are reminded of their general duty to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the safety health and welfare at work of their employees and that of others who may be present at the place of work
- Employers must continue to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the design, provision and maintenance of plant and machinery so that it is safe and without risk to health. Should duty-holders have any concern about the continued safe operation or use of such plant or equipment, it should be removed from service until such concerns have been appropriately addressed
- It is anticipated that some statutory inspections will not be possible during the COVID 19 crisis, when this is the case a risk-based approach should be used to assess site equipment that may fall out of its inspection regime
- The following three tier system maybe considered:
 - Tier One: Low Risk – Where previous reports had shown minimal wear not near to its tolerance limits, with low usage then the period between could be extended
 - Tier Two: Medium Risk – Where previous examinations had shown some wear, but still above its tolerance limits with medium use then additional mitigation measures put in place prior to extending the interval between inspections. The additional mitigation measures could include visual inspection of components by a trained technician
 - Tier Three: High Risk – Where previous examinations had shown wear approaching the tolerance limits and additional usage then an alternative means of access would be required

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- If this results in additional climbing being required by workers, then any additional health and safety risks would need to be managed including the limiting and monitoring of individual climb distance

Rescue of technician

- The rescue of a technician from a turbine is considered an emergency situation
- Physical distancing guidelines cannot be respected during such activities in order to ensure life is preserved

General

- Face to Face meeting with customers should be cancelled and replaced with online meetings / conference calls
- Avoid exchanging personal items between colleagues such as mobile phone, laptop, pens etc.
- Tools which are shared by teams should be handled with clean gloves to avoid risk of spreading contamination and should be **disinfected** after use
- All Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is for the sole use of the individual. PPE shall never be shared
- [HSE's guidance on Physical Distancing, Disinfecting, Washing Hands, Hand Sanitiser, Symptoms, Notifying should be adhered to at all times](#)

Mental Health

- Stay informed through official sources and set limits for news and social media
- Keep up healthy routines such as exercise and diet
- Stay connected to others
- Try to anticipate distress and support each other
- Don't make assumptions which may stigmatise an individual's health
- Recognition of other colleagues' physical health and age brackets may categorise them in vulnerable groups impacting roles and responsibilities