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FAQs for NSI Approved Companies

In Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

<u>Security Systems, Fire Safety Companies</u>
<u>And Alarm Receiving Centres</u>

Issue 3*, 1st May 2020

Please note: *FAQs added in this issue are denoted by the prefix '**NEW**' at the start of the question.*

NSI recognises approved companies in the security and fire sector are working hard to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, prioritising the health and wellbeing of staff and taking necessary steps to support their customers and maintain business continuity.

In order to best support industry and the approved company community in these unprecedented circumstances, NSI has suspended all audit and assessment activity from 6th April until at least 31st May 2020 inclusive. Audit activities will resume when, in due course, Government restrictions are relaxed.

When audits resume all evidence of non-compliances that are COVID-19 related will be reported in "Auditor Notes" without recourse to raising Improvement Needs and Observations.

<u>MAINTENANCE</u>

1. ***If I cannot get to call outs to carry out corrective maintenances within the 4/8 hours required then how will NSI treat these at my next audit?***

    During your audit, if you can provide evidence to the auditor that the increase in response times was genuinely impacted by COVID-19 related issues, a non-conformance report will not be raised. The auditor will raise an Audit Note to document this and the situation will be reviewed at the next audit. This will also be reflected in the visit report raised at the end of the audit.

This information is being updated when circumstances change. Please check regularly for updates

2. *If my routine maintenance performance figures fall way below the required achievement rate then how will NSI treat these at my next audit?*

   If your performance figures fall below the required achievement rate and, during your audit, you can provide evidence to the auditor that the decrease was genuinely COVID-19 related, the auditor will raise an Audit Note to document this and the situation will be reviewed at the next audit. This will also be reflected in the visit report raised at the end of the audit.

3. **NEW –** *BS 9263 allows one remote maintenance check plus one physical check per year under certain conditions. Given the current situation, where access is not possible, is it permissible to carry out remote maintenance checks in place of physical checks?*

   Where a physical maintenance check is due and cannot be carried out due to the impact of COVID-19, this may be substituted for a remote maintenance check provided that:

   - the customer has agreed that the physical maintenance check due can be replaced by a remote maintenance check;
   - the customer is notified of any limitations introduced by the substitution of a physical check for a remote check (e.g. checks for physical damage, wear and tear, and detector range reduction etc., as these cannot be checked remotely); and
   - any issues identified during the remote maintenance check that require corrective action are notified to the customer and follow-up action agreed.

4. *Should my company be doing normal maintenance checks for all clients in the current environment?*

   Essential maintenance may be carried out in domestic and non-domestic premises provided instruction outlined in the current government guidance is observed. Any work should be "risk assessed" before it is carried out.

   The following text is taken from current Government guidance (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/social-distancing-in-the-workplace-during-coronavirus-covid-19-sector-guidance):

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*"**Tradespeople and working in people's homes**

You are a tradesperson carrying out <u>*essential repairs and maintenance*</u> *in people's homes. You can continue work, providing that you are well and have no symptoms. You should notify all clients in advance of your arrival.*

On entry to the home you should wash your hands using soap and water for 20 seconds. You should wash your hands regularly, particularly after blowing your nose, sneezing or coughing, and when leaving the property. Where facilities to wash hands are not available, hand sanitiser should be used, and you should carry this with you at all times.

You should maintain a safe distance (at least 2 metres) from any household occupants at all times, and ensure good ventilation in the area where you are working, including opening the window.

No work should be carried out in any household which is isolating or where an individual is being shielded, unless your work is to remedy a direct risk to the safety of the household, such as emergency plumbing or repair.

No work should be carried out by a tradesperson who has coronavirus symptoms, however mild."

The above precautions could also be applied where work is being undertaken in a non-domestic environment. Therefore, in-line with the current government guidance above, your company may continue to carry out <u>essential repairs and maintenance</u> (including preventive maintenance) where site access is granted and where social distancing can be achieved. The Government has not provided any guidance on what is considered to be "essential repairs and maintenance" so you will need to determine this on a case-by-case basis. Companies should not be carrying out activities that might contradict government instruction on social distancing.

Approved companies are advised to regularly check the www.gov.uk website for the latest Government guidance.

5.   **NEW** *- If preventive maintenance visits are not carried out as scheduled will this affect my customer's insurance cover?*

Where the system has been installed as an insurer requirement they may still expect, even during the current circumstances, that the insured risk remains protected. As many premises are currently closed for a considerable length of time, or are operating with significantly reduced staffing levels, then some insurers may consider the risk to

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be increased and will still expect the system(s) to be fully operational and maintained. Physical maintenance checks may still be carried out providing the relevant Government guidance is followed (see point 4 above).

Your customers are advised to consult with their insurers where the system(s) cannot be maintained as required due to the impact of COVID-19.

6.   **NEW** - *As part of our post COVID-19 recovery planning, we are prioritising preventive maintenance visits to I&HAS that do not have connectivity for remote maintenance. Where physical maintenance visits are due to I&HAS with remote maintenance connectivity, can these be substituted with remote maintenance checks?*

In short: "Yes". Recovery planning will be specific to the situation within your business. Your NSI auditor will want to see evidence of a plan that optimises protection for your customers as business returns to 'normal'. In any event, physical maintenance visits of remotely monitored systems should be part of your recovery planning, with 'normal' maintenance schedules being resumed as soon as possible for all systems.

Where physical visits are substituted for remote visits the bullet points in question 3 will apply.

<u>KEY WORKERS</u>

1.   *Who has the Government classified as Key Workers?*

In light of social distancing measures, Key Workers essential to the running of public and other services across the UK including the NHS and critical infrastructure, have been categorised by Government. The intent is to ensure health and safety for the public at large during the pandemic and efforts to control COVID-19.

Currently those companies providing a service to an institution or business classified as critical, e.g. hospitals, social care, supermarkets and the food supply chain, national infrastructure and utilities, and their employees are already designated Key Workers as the services they provide are required to enable these public spaces to continue to function safely. See the full Government list of designated Key Workers.

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Key Worker status is only directly relevant to the ability to access the school and childcare systems at this time. This definition does not affect whether or not you can travel to work - if you are not a Key Worker, you may still travel to work where this absolutely cannot be done from home.

The list may change over time. Government advice is to stay at home whenever possible. It is to keep your children at home whenever possible – even if you are a Key Worker. If, and only if, you are undertaking an essential role, supporting the nation's COVID-19 response, which you can only do by accessing the school or childcare systems, should you do so as a Key Worker.

2.   *Are my service engineers classified as Key Workers?*

It is NSI's view that service engineers providing critical maintenance and emergency call-outs to ensure effective security and safety cover are Key Workers.

3.   *Are my fire detection and intruder alarm system engineers allowed to respond to requests for critical maintenance and emergency call outs in environments other than those stipulated under the Governments 8 key headings?*

It is the view of NSI and the NFCC that fire detection and intruder alarm system engineers are Key Workers, providing critical maintenance and emergency call-outs to ensure effective security and safety cover.

4.   *Are ARC operators classified as Key Workers by the Government?*

ARC operators and essential staff are Key Workers, handling alarm signals and notifications of confirmed alarms to the Police in order to facilitate the Police response to intruder and hold-up alarms.

5.   *In the case of a complete lockdown what is the situation regarding "Remote Working" for ARCs?*

As you know the use of remote workers to facilitate the operations of an ARC is non-compliant with various clauses of BS 5979:2007 or BS EN 50518, 2013 series. Under these extreme circumstances NSI recognise that companies are operating in the best practice possible even where full compliance, applicable in normal circumstances is unachievable.

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SCREENING

1. *How can I cover the Right To Work(RTW) document requirements as required by BS 7858 for preliminary screening when we cannot travel and we cannot see the original RTW documents during the interview stage?*

    The Government has issued revised guidance during the current COVID-19 crisis and information can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-right-to-work-checks

2. *How should I cover ID checks when the public cannot travel and in some cases there are delays in receiving physical documents?*

    The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) has announced temporary changes to the standard and enhanced ID checking guidelines, effective from 19th March 2020, to ensure necessary checks can still be conducted in light of current measures in place as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak.

    The temporary changes will permit:

    *   ID documents to be viewed over video link; and
    *   scanned images to be used in advance of the DBS check being submitted.

    The applicant will be required to present the original versions of these documents when they first attend their employment or volunteering role.

    The change will assist those companies screening personnel to BS 7858 when conducting identity checks.

    Full details are available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/covid-19-changes-to-dbs-id-checking-guidelines

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