

## **May 12<sup>th</sup> comments to the business department, BEIS, on updated 'Working safely during coronavirus' guidance and related documents**

The guidance on safer working published on May 11<sup>th</sup> was a helpful addition to previous guidance on gov.uk. It is appropriate, and it helps to keep the economy going and to build momentum. Many firms in EAMA's sector have remained open throughout the crisis, albeit many of those at reduced output, and others have re-opened. They have adapted their working to the new circumstances and drawn on government guidance. The latest update reflects good practice and has renewed firms' confidence that they are operating appropriately.

Members have commented on the apparently low level of engagement of HSE in this process. Normally, HSE would be the lead on safe working and, ideally, it is felt that is where guidance should rest. However, business welcomes the fact that it has appropriate guidance.

The presentation of guidance for the various sectors of the economy, including manufacturing and the distributor sector, was helpful, as was guidance on PPE and the detailed explanation regarding face-coverings, which strikes the right note. The related guidance about face-coverings on public transport and in some retail sites is clear but the nuanced difference highlights that this is not a black-and-white issue.

### **Mental health and well-being**

A future revision should consider giving more prominence to the issue of mental health and well-being. This has become a major concern for employers since the new restrictions were introduced. EAMA's members are taking many calls from companies seeking advice, for example regarding stresses around home working and furlough. Employees are also fearful for the future.

### **Posting results of risk assessments online**

We disagree with the new approach to encourage firms to put their risk assessments on their company website and the expectation that firms with more than 50 employees will do so. We understand that there may be a need to re-assure the public that the issue is being taken seriously, but this is not the appropriate solution. It sets an unwelcome precedent, and it will be an unwelcome distraction, especially for SMEs.

Companies should have an up-to-date risk assessment, that reflects the new risks associated with Covid-19. However, businesses are fully aware of their responsibilities to their employees, and they wish to protect their employees; just as their employees wish to be protected. Both have a strong interest in an appropriate risk assessment and in making the policy work in practice. They are the people who matter, and they do not need to see the policy on the company website.

Company risk assessments will evolve as more is learned - government guidance has already had three iterations and more are expected. They are just one part of a range of measures used in daily operations to ensure adequate health and safety in the workplace. Using them in daily operations to identify and mitigate hazards is their sole purpose.

The reality of this new expectation is that, once a risk assessment is completed, it will be passed to the marketing specialists to be made suitably attractive for presentation online. Safety is an inappropriate subject for public marketing and, inevitably, competition in this way. In addition, we question how interested the public would be, and how credible they would regard website statements as an accurate guide to what happened in a company.

Public concern over coronavirus safety at work has resulted, in large part, from a lack of understanding that much of industry has adapted and kept going responsibly and in line with guidance; indeed, that it was important for it to do so. The message that “it is important for business to carry on” has been there from the start from government; but it has been unable to compete with the prominence of “Stay Home”: it has been “lost between broadcast and reception”, to quote one government source. It was for this reason that EAMA urged that the prime minister highlight to the public the fact that firms had continued to work, responsibly, within guidance. We need to get away from the public perception that these are all-new rules allowing a re-start of manufacturing. It never stopped.

We strongly recommend that the government’s position on posting risk assessments on company websites not be taken forward.

**Jack Semple**  
**Alliance secretary**  
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