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Tithíochta
The Housing Agency



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Guidance for Multi-Unit Developments and Residential Owners' Management Companies during Coronavirus (COVID-19)



Guidance

This document is intended to provide practical guidance for owners' management companies ("OMCs"), their property management agents, and their directors during the period of the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic. The material relates to residential OMCs only.

The guidance provided is subject to the continuing public health advice, including the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business, issued by Government, available at gov.ie.

The guidance is subject and secondary to the provisions of law related to residential OMCs, including but not limited to the Multi-Unit Developments Act 2011, and the Companies Act 2014. In the event of any conflict between the content of this guidance and legislation, or public health advice, the legislation and public health advice prevail.

This guide is a live document and may be subject to change from time to time. Compliance with guidance in this document is not the responsibility of the authors.

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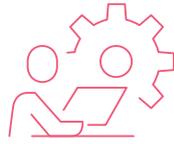
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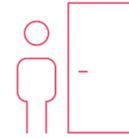
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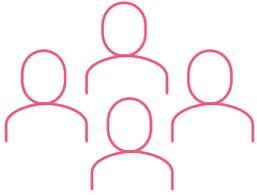


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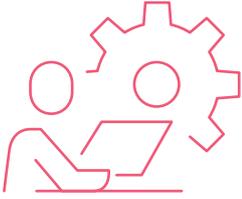






OMC Guidance

- **Comply with the HSE and Government latest guidance** for controlling transmission of Coronavirus (COVID-19), available from gov.ie.
- Where possible, provide **information and education by posting visual displays** advising occupants of the importance of physical distancing and safe hygiene practices within the estate/building. Materials such as posters and flyers are available through the Coronavirus (COVID-19) page of hse.ie.
- Consider whether the application of estate lease covenants, terms of insurance policies, or other arrangements, may be **affected by the prevailing restrictions**.
- **Take appropriate actions to ensure that the OMC remains in good financial health.** The Housing Agency has issued information and guidance, available at www.housingagency.ie/publications/MUD-OMC-COVID-19.
- Directors should at all times **ensure compliance with the provisions of company law**, including the Companies Act 2014.
- OMC directors are at the Annual General Meeting accountable to the members for their stewardship of the company's affairs. **Directors might reflect on proposed courses of action in the context of their duties** under the MUD Act, company law, and in particular the duty to act in the best interests of the members, and the company.
- OMCs should **ensure compliance with the provisions of other relevant legislation**, including but not limited to the Multi-Unit Developments Act 2011.
- Directors might **review the frequency of board meetings**, and if thought necessary consider an increased frequency for the period of the pandemic.
- In apartment blocks try to **facilitate residents to receive deliveries** of essential goods, such as medications and groceries/meals, at the door of their home. This may help to reduce circulation in common areas.
- Where possible **clean routinely and frequently touched surfaces and objects**, including but not limited to, bathrooms, security desk areas, door handles, doorknobs, elevator buttons, light switches, toilet handles, counters, handrails, fob panels, touch screen surfaces, and keypads. If this is not possible on a regular basis, endeavour to advise residents that they should take appropriate personal precautions when entering or exiting the building.
- Where requested by occupants, and in line with best practice and appropriate advice, **consider the installation of hand sanitiser stations** at entrances, and in high-traffic areas of buildings. Factors including cost, sustainability, and security, will require due consideration.
- **Endeavour to support occupants** by way of clear, consistent, relevant and timely communication. Communications should reflect prevailing public health advice.
- **Close communications with owners of multiple properties may be beneficial.** Owners such as Local Authorities, Approved Housing Bodies, and private commercial or institutional landlords, may be in a position to offer enhanced cooperation in relation to orderly estate management.
- **Consider carefully communications** that might in any way reflect the health status of staff or residents, and ensure compliance with data protection requirements.
- Subject to prevailing public health advice, **consider continued closure of common areas that do not support residents' basic needs.** Such facilities may include entertainment rooms and leisure facilities. Take precautions in common areas that remain open:
 - Facilitate external staff or residents to clean and disinfect all high-touch surfaces between uses. These include keyboards, computer mice, touch screens, and exercise equipment.
 - Try to facilitate external staff and residents to maintain the advised social distance while using common areas. If needed, limit the number of people using a common area at the same time.
 - Consider using visual reminders about advised spacing in areas where people tend to congregate.

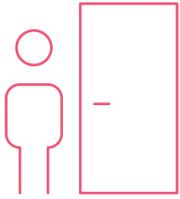


Managing Agent Guidance

- **Accurate, timely and regular communications** with employees, OMC directors, residents, suppliers and even the media are critical. Make sure you have all available contact information for your staff, residents and suppliers (cell, e-mail, etc.), and develop alternative ways to disseminate information (corporate websites, app-based notifications, text messaging, social media, etc.).
 - Consider the erection of signage encouraging owners and residents to carry out essential repairs only. Routine repairs can lead to increased contact with owners/occupiers.
 - Encourage contractors to post cleaning checklist sheets in the common areas, showing priority cleaning to door handles, elevator buttons, light switches, ledges, post boxes, handles, and handrails. They are doing the work already.
- **Proactively manage OMC budgets and service charge collection** to help the OMC maintain good financial health for the period of the pandemic.
- Engage the OMC directors in the process of **limiting expenditure where possible** to the fixed cost elements of the budget for the coming year.
- **Ensure the doors/fob access systems are working correctly.** This should facilitate entrance to and egress from the building by residents and delivery services. Adherence to measures against 'tail-gating' at entrance doors and other access points, e.g. carpark gates, should be emphasised.
- Consider whether it is possible to **identify vulnerable or isolated occupants**, and whether they may wish to be connected to appropriate external support services.
- **Consider continued closure of common areas**, for example entertainment rooms, that do not support residents' basic needs.
- **Encourage occupants and staff to practice social distancing.**
- Consider the requirement for **access to houses/ apartments for maintenance, repairs and inspections.** Residences should be entered to facilitate essential repairs only. Close contact with the occupant should be avoided during any attendance at a residence.
- **Cleaning requirements:** Follow guidance of the HSE and Government concerning any cleaning of surfaces considered necessary arising from cases of self-isolation. Guidance is available through the Coronavirus (COVID-19) page of hse.ie. Additional cleaning that may be advised by public health authorities, or requested by the OMC, may require the use of personal protective equipment (PPE). Deep cleaning or disinfecting may be beyond the capability of your team, or the regular cleaning service. Consideration should be given to engaging the services of a suitably qualified specialist provider.
- **Lifts, stairs, lobbies, and halls:**
 - Encourage residents to refrain from direct contact with touch surfaces; use of elbows or feet to open doors might be appropriate. Installation of additional fixtures such as push plates and kick plates may facilitate such measures.
 - Consider lift sizes, number of building floors, and daily number of tenants and visitors when placing queuing marks in elevator lobbies to reinforce social distancing.
 - If an elevator cab is not large enough to accommodate the advised spacing, consider designating elevators separately for "up" and "down" use. Such measures may help shorten lift journey times.
 - To allow for faster lift loading, consider programming elevators to return to the ground floor.
 - To ease elevator traffic and wait times, consider opening stairwells and designate "up" and "down" stairwells.
 - Consider the implementation of one-way circulation systems, where premises allow.
 - Be cognisant of the potential impact of measures on mobility-impaired residents, and ensure respect for the relevant regulations.
 - As noted elsewhere in this guidance compliance with fire regulations must not be compromised.
 - Liaison with insurers may be required in respect of potential impacts on public liability insurance cover.
- If agents or estate managers **facilitate the delivery of packages**, arrange to have these left outside the door of the residence. This may help to avoid close contact with self-isolating residents.

- **Support to the resident:** A period of self-isolation may be stressful for an occupant. You should endeavour to be empathetic and supportive during this challenging time. Keep in mind restrictions on your ability to be in close physical contact with the occupant. Set reasonable expectations with the resident about your ability to provide assistance.
- In respect of direct employees, **follow Occupational Health and Safety requirements.** These impose duties on employers to ensure a safe and healthy work environment.
- **Maintain clear and consistent communications with occupants and service providers.** Inform them of the steps you are taking to clean and sanitise the property. Learn how contractors are addressing the outbreak with their employees and customers.
- **Suppliers:**
 - Require your suppliers to share their health and safety plans, adapted method statements, and new protocols.
 - Amend operating procedures for construction contractors to incorporate specific COVID-19 requirements, including questionnaires, use of appropriate PPE, etc.
 - Identify back-up suppliers where possible in case of personnel shortages or supply chain interruptions to existing providers.
 - Staff of suppliers and contractors attending estates might be requested to inform Managing Agents if such personnel know they have been exposed to the virus, or are exhibiting symptoms of infection.
- Consider posting **signs at entrances instructing visitors not to enter if they are sick** or if they have had close contact with a person who may have or does have COVID-19.
- The erection of **signage advising visitors to curtail their movement** in the building and their use of common areas to essential visits may be helpful. Materials including posters are available through the Coronavirus (COVID-19) page of hse.ie.
- Property management agents should **assess whether an impending service request is essential**, and consider postponing the service if it is not urgent.
- Property management agents should **provide to occupants advance notification of impending works.**
- Consider changes required to **procedures for the inspection of life safety systems**, for example inspection of smoke and heat detectors in residences.
- Staff carrying out **essential work in a residence should do so in a separate room** if the occupant is at home. Where this is not possible the advised physical distance should be maintained between the staff member and occupant.
- If possible, **limit visitor access to a single point of entry** in your building/site that staff can easily monitor.
- **Consider potential risks involved** in the restoration of water, gas, and other services to residences unoccupied for the initial period of the restrictions.





Owner Occupier/ Tenant Guidance

- Consider that estate **services are being adapted to comply with Government and HSE guidelines**. Services may continually alter in line with latest phases of public health advice.
- Additional **services beyond the scope of the budget may be provided** if approved by the OMC directors.
- **Be proactive about your own adherence to health measures**. Practice compliance with all HSE and Government guidance in relation to social distancing, hand hygiene, and respiratory etiquette. Where possible in common areas practice 'clean as you go'.
- **Social distancing should be observed at all times** as you move through the common areas of the building and the estate.
- If your Managing Agent provides an online portal or communication system **please check it regularly for updates**. Consider that some communications may in error be re-directed by email spam or junk filters.
- **Exercise appropriate refuse and recycling waste disposal practices** when using communal waste stores. Ensure to dispose of waste correctly, and guard against the generation of unnecessary cleaning work. Simple measures like compacting of recycling materials may assist with waste volume reduction. Consider how your actions may allow the OMC to focus on COVID-19 related cleaning.
- This is a challenging time for everyone. Please **exercise courtesy and respect for your neighbours** by observing the estate house rules.
- Be conscious that **many of your neighbours may be required to work from home**. Consider your conduct, potential unnecessary disturbances, and level of activity in estate common areas.
- Public health restrictions mean that **residents may be at home for much longer periods** than is otherwise the case. Exercise due care with parking practices, use of balconies, and use of private spaces such as gardens adjacent to common areas.
- **Observance of house rules** prohibiting use of barbecues, disposal grills, etc. in common areas is all the more important with extended periods of home occupancy.
- Exercise practices to **guard against 'tail-gating' at entry points to buildings**. Make sure that doors, gates and other key access points are closed behind you.
- In line with public health advice, endeavour to **limit visits by others to your home**.
- Building occupants should **follow the building's standard protocols if a fire alarm sounds**, and fire safety should not be compromised. Fire and building codes should continue to be followed. Fire doors should never be propped open. Circulation areas including lobbies, halls and corridors should be kept free of obstacles, e.g. bicycles, furniture, or toys.
- In the event of a fire emergency occupants should **endeavour to practice social distancing**, and maintain the advised distance apart as they congregate at fire points.



DISCLAIMER

This guidance does not take primacy over legislation, statutory regulations or official health advice.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with current official advice from government, its agencies, and the HSE guidelines.

The authors of this document will not be liable for any losses (financial or otherwise, direct or indirect) arising from adoption or implementation of this guidance, or failure to adopt or implement this guidance.

Owners' management companies and their directors, and property services providers, should carry out their own risk assessment of their activities. This guidance is intended to act only as a supplement to the latest official government and HSE advice.

Parties using this guidance for their business activities do so whilst taking legal advice to ensure that its application is acceptable in each circumstance.

The authors do not accept any liability that this guidance will ensure full compliance with the latest regulations.



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