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Safe Working Environments

GUIDANCE FOR COMMISSIONERS
DURING COVID-19:

SPECIALIZED GROUP LIVING, INSTALLATION
& MAINTENANCE OF TEC

Safe Working Environments

Guidance for Commissioners During COVID-19: Specialized Group Living, Installation and Maintenance of TEC

During the Covid-19 pandemic, we have seen a reluctance by some housing providers, commissioners and service providers, to allow engineers to enter properties to carry out work on TEC systems. This has been understandable, as we have seen the virus spread rapidly and indeed with a second wave hitting the country.

However, it is more important than ever, that we ensure that our service users are offered effective and well-maintained Telecare systems, that can be used to summon the help they are need. There has been a greater reliance on these systems, as many visiting services have had to cease operation.

We have seen that maintenance for gas systems has been conducted as there is a legal requirement to do so and we all understand what can go wrong if this activity is not completed. Telecare Alarm systems are equally important for the safety of the service user and just like your gas systems, need regular preventive maintenance to ensure they are working properly.

This short guidance has been produced with both manufacturers, installation companies and the TSA specific to Grouped, Specialized Housing, to provide reassurance that the pandemic does not need to prevent installations, replacements, or planned and reactive maintenance from taking place, thus providing the support your customers need. Separate guidance has been written by TSA, which covers the installation of dispersed alarm equipment in individual, non-grouped dwellings.

Installers will take every necessary precaution, to ensure that service users and their own staff will be kept safe and have reviewed all their installation processes, to minimise any possible exposure to the virus. Each installation organisation, in line with TSA guidance, will have put contingencies and business continuity processes in place, which are being continually reviewed, to ensure they can deliver the maintenance and installation services required. This includes providing adequate staffing and equipment stock levels.

TSA has also developed supporting material, in-line with Government guidance in areas of Infection Prevention and Control and for Decontamination, within which your installation organisation will work.

The Housing Provider Viewpoint

The TEC systems we use for our residents, not only gives customers peace of mind, they also help them to maintain an independent lifestyle with the security of knowing someone will always be there for them should they need it.

Like most people living on their own during Covid-19, Karbon's customers have felt isolated during lockdown and with strict social distancing measures in place and limited face-to-face contact, this has had a huge impact on people's lives. The alarm system has been crucial during this time to ensure our customers feel connected and reassured they have somebody they can turn to in case of an emergency.

TEC plays an important role in helping customers stay independent in their homes for longer. For many service users and carers, the Monitoring Centre keeps customers feeling confident that they are safe in their home, whilst providing a 'lifeline' to help and support should they need it. Therefore, it is essential that the systems are available for use and in full working order when they need them. Our engineers that support the systems, form part of that reassurance and have been sympathetic to the needs of our residents during the pandemic.

Jon McDonald, Retirement Living Manager at Karbon Homes

What the British and European Standards Say

In 2019 and to assist Housing Providers and Commissioners with appropriate guidance, a new British Standard was introduced, which focusses on the safe installation and maintenance of hard-wired social alarm systems, normally found in sheltered accommodation, or grouped living environments. This standard, BS 8604-1:2019 provides guidance on design, installation and maintenance of social alarm systems in specialized group living.

If system faults go un-detected, or allowed to deteriorate, the risk to the service user will be increased. If faults are allowed to go unresolved, the system may not work should the service user need to call for assistance, but the system will not work.

Section 9 of the standard states that

“a preventative maintenance programme should be undertaken at intervals of not less than once every 12 months, or more frequently if advised by the manufacturer”.

This includes elements of the system such as the local unit in the service users residence and controller (or equipment rack), battery back-up and any charging equipment if provided.

The standard goes on to detail what should be tested and that any corrective action should be taken, which should be done during the maintenance visit itself if possible and by agreement with the site owner.

The standard also says that 'In Service Testing' should also be undertaken in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations, along with tests by the service users themselves. A full system test should be conducted annually, the detail of which, should be decided on a service user risk basis, for the residents of the premises.

The European Standard, BS EN 50134 also reinforces the guidance above and similarly asks for service providers to have policies and procedures for regular testing and maintenance of systems, which should have maximum response times for their repair. It also says that preventative maintenance requirements for the equipment forming the alarm system should be specified and adhered to in contracts with the maintainers.

System Upgrades

As we move from systems that use the older style telecommunications platforms, to newer digital solutions, it is equally important that Housing Providers and Commissioners do not delay planned upgrades. At TSA, we are seeing an increase in the number of problems being experienced by service providers, as older analogue systems communicate over the digital networks and it is predicted that these issues will increase in regularity, as more of the telecoms infrastructure moves to a digital solution. The issues of communication can be seen as an increase in failed calls to monitoring centres from alarm systems, or where systems fail to connect properly.

More information on the Analogue to Digital migration can be found on the TSA website here <https://www.tsa-voice.org.uk/campaigns/digital-shift/>. Manufacturers are already developing systems that are designed specifically for the digital telecoms platforms and it is important that upgrades go ahead as planned.

What are the Risks of Not Conducting Maintenance?

Maintenance of life critical safety systems isn't just an exercise in compliance, it is a fundamental part of ensuring the systems that support clients are in the best possible condition for the moments that users need them most.

Systems that do not receive regular servicing can often look as if they are fully functioning, however behind the scenes serviceable items such as sealed lead acid batteries can deteriorate. Battery warping is a common issue which can result in a greatly reduced capacity to keep the system going in the event of power failure, therefore jeopardising the effectiveness of a life critical system and leave service users even more vulnerable.

During this unprecedented year installers have had to work more closely with their clients than ever before to ensure service users are kept safe. Installation works have had to be rethought from inception to delivery to ensure those who are vulnerable, or shielding are protected throughout the works. We are proud to say that during these times the spirit of collaboration to create a secure working environment for installers and service users has been phenomenal.

None of this would have been possible without the immense support from the housing providers we work with.

Aaron Keith, Managing Director, Sentinel Fire and Security Solutions Ltd.

The Installers Assurance

All TEC installation companies are very accustomed to working within strict health and safety guidelines and many are certified to ISO 9001 and are NIC/EIC compliant, as well as being certified to the TSA Quality Standards Framework. Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, installers have worked hard to ensure that they can provide safe service to their customers, but that they can also protect their staff.

As assurance that the work you have requested will be conducted safely, your installation company will ensure:

- That they take every precaution and are adapting and following TSA/UK Government guidelines to ensure that safety and quality of service is delivered throughout the installation.
- All installations will be managed by their specific Contracts team.
- All Health and Safety aspects of the project will be managed.
- A pre-site assessment will be carried out to determine that the site environment is safe to work for staff, residents and engineers.
- Teams will wear appropriate PPE to keep themselves, your staff and residents safe but which will not affect their working capabilities.
- That if any of their teams leave site and return the same day, fresh PPE will be worn.
- Teams are provided with sanitising products and will use them as necessary during the installation.
- Sanitising products will be used for cleaning all surfaces before and after works.
- All tools and equipment will be sanitised before and after use.
- Teams are provided with personal thermometers to check their temperature throughout

the day.

- That at no point during the installation will the site be left vulnerable for system operation.
- That prior to attending site, they will make contact with site contact to carry out a pre-attendance questionnaire. This will question if there are any staff or residents with Covid 19 symptoms and if your site has any residents who are shielding, or in self-isolation. This will allow them to plan the installation and ensure arrangements are in place for all residents.
- There may be occasions where teams ask staff or residents to vacate a location whilst they carry out works. Teams will liaise with the site contact and provide notice of this.
- That If any of their team members show symptoms, they will cancel bookings and isolate for the government recommended period.

What the Installers Say

After the initial lockdown in March 2020, the first full installation that was not part of a construction project, was in July 2020 during the height of the pandemic. In most instances existing systems were still in working order with the emphasis being the digital transition, however some have been fast tracked due to product obsolescence and concerns around system support. There is also a large emphasis around fire safety with properties requiring new detection systems linked to the Social Alarm Systems.

From pre-start to commissioning we have encountered challenges in delivering projects in occupied dwellings, however we have been able to overcome them with our fully trained staff and by following the guidance. Initially and importantly, we have provided advice, guidance and reassurance to residents around the project and works within their homes. Pre Covid 19 this may have been carried out by a demonstration at the development where residents would attend and meet the team to see products, discuss the works and alleviate any concerns. We have produced documents which can be electronically sent, or delivered under current guidance which entail information on the above and provided contact email and telephone numbers to address any queries. We have also been asked to carry out a brief individual socially distanced visit to each flat entrance door to explain the works and gain acceptance for the upgrade to commence. These projects proved a success with 100% access and completion throughout the works.

Once access and the agreement of works to commence is reached, all works have been carried out in accordance with the above guidance ensuring that the residents are provided with the choice of vacating their property if works are required throughout or moving to another room within their flat if certain areas were undisrupted.

The outcome was safe service users who felt cared for by their Housing Provider. In all cases, the projects were a success with access to all properties achieved. Projects varied in size with a mix of development types from grouped bungalows to sheltered housing.

With the correct planning, information and working practises put in place residents quickly overcame any concerns around the pandemic and felt more secure in the knowledge that their life safety systems were in full working order and benefitting from the latest features and benefits associated with them.

It is important remember that the deadlines for the migration to Digital, Next Generation Networks and Fire Safety guidance must still be our target despite Covid 19 to ensure residents living in grouped living environments are provided with the highest levels of support available through TEC.

Mark McGreevy, Divisional Sales Manager, Secureshield Ltd

What will be asked of you

As with any project, communication with your installation company is vital during this time. So, to ensure things run smoothly and to minimise the risk of infection, it is important that:

- You notify the installers immediately if any staff or residents are displaying any symptoms of COVID-19. If this does happen, all installation works will be put on hold for a minimum of 14 days. At no point will the site be left vulnerable for system operation. The installer will remain in communication with you, to establish when it is safe for their teams to return and complete the work.
- You should advise them of any special requests you have outside the scope of this guide, that affect the installation process. Installers will do what they can to accommodate these requests if they are able. This can be done with the installation teams at the time the pre-attendance questionnaire is completed, or during the project itself, especially if circumstances change.

Prior to Starting Work

To ensure that everything is ready for teams to attend site, your installation company will carry out some functions in preparation and to ensure things run smoothly. They will undertake the following measures:

- A dedicated project engineer should contact you to carry out a pre-site assessment to determine the site environment is safe to work for staff, residents and engineers.
- The engineer will be assigned to your site, to ensure that all health and safety guidelines are adhered to throughout the installation and will be on hand should you have any questions or concerns throughout the project.
- All customers will be reassured that installers will take every precaution and are adapting as

appropriate, while following UK Government and TSA guidelines to ensure that safety and quality of service is delivered to all customers and service users throughout these uncertain times.

- Engineers will be equipped with and wear the appropriate, fresh PPE for each situation and site they attend.
- Should an engineer leave site and return the same day, fresh PPE will again be worn.
- Alcohol wipes will be used for cleaning engineer tools and equipment prior to entry of premises/installation.
- Engineers will also be equipped with personal thermometers to check their temperature throughout the day.
- Prior to attending site, contact will be made with the person responsible for the site, to carry out/complete a pre-attendance questionnaire. This will ascertain if there are any staff or residents with Covid 19 symptoms and if your site has any shielded residents, or who are in self-isolation. This will allow us to plan the installation and ensure arrangements are made for any shielded or self-isolating residents.
- Prior to commencement of work, pre site inspections will have taken place and all measures in relation to H&S have been taken into consideration.
- All operational personnel are fully informed, instructed and trained in the correct and safe use of ladders and associated equipment.”

Working on site:

Engineers take social distancing guidelines extremely seriously and will take every precaution and will adapt as appropriate to the needs of your organisation and the service user:

- Engineers will always be understanding of the service users concerns and will respect their wishes at all times.
- Engineers will confirm with the site manager on arrival that the pre-attendance questionnaire is still current regarding staff or residents with suspected or confirmed Covid19 symptoms. If the engineer has any concerns on entering a residence, they will advise the site manager and the project engineer immediately.
- Engineers will wear gloves when removing / installing textiles i.e. pull cords which are harder to sanitise.
- If possible, residents will be asked to relocate to a different room within the residence for the duration of the installation, or engineers visit.
- Where this is not possible residents will be asked to maintain a 2-metre distance for the duration of the installation.
- To reduce disruption, Installation time within the residence will always be kept to a minimum.
- All operational personnel are fully informed, instructed and trained in the correct and safe use of PPE, ladders and associated equipment.
- They follow the TSA/UK Government guidelines to ensure that the safety and quality of service is delivered to all customers throughout these uncertain times.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in use:

Ongoing site monitoring is an essential part of installation operations along with the supervision of all operatives to ensure compliance to safe and robust health and safety procedures. All engineers will have been supplied with the correct general health and safety equipment, along with Level 2 PPE for the situation they will attend. It is unlikely that engineers would work in environments where confirmed cases of Covid-19 exist, but if this is absolutely necessary, then Level 3 PPE would be worn. Examples of PPE equipment can be seen below:

- FFP2 face mask/face shield as necessary
- Goggles
- Protective Footwear
- Gloves
- Hard hat / bump cap
- Knee Pads
- Ear defenders
- Disposable Overalls for non-licensed asbestos work
- Hi visible jacket
- Overalls / Protective clothing for cold or inclement weather
- Overshoes
- Disposable bags & Tape to seal
- Hand sanitiser
- Alcohol wipes
- Thermometer

Installation teams will also be adhering to the Government guidance, which can be found on the TSA website as listed earlier in this document.

Note: All installation engineers should place used PPE in sealed bags, removed from site and stored for at least 72 hours before being disposed of using the correct waste disposal method. Further information on the use of PPE and Infection Prevention and Control, can be found on the TSA Website as listed below.

For more information on this subject, or if you have any questions with regard to installation processes during the Covid-19 pandemic, please contact admin@tsa-voice.org.uk, or ring 01625 520310, where one of our associates will be happy to help.

The TSA would like to thank Legrand for being instrumental in the production of this guidance along with Karbon Homes, Secureshield Ltd. and Sentinel Fire and Security Systems for their contributions.

"Legrand are delighted to support TSA and the sector to demonstrate the safe working practices for the installation of TECS in whatever setting. We fully support this guidance, which is fundamental and long awaited to ensure our customers are safe and secure and can live independently in the comfort of their home. It should be noted that these safety standards were in place prior to the global pandemic hitting us although are heightened as a result. The safety of clients and our colleagues is of utmost importance and we can and have demonstrated that this is possible with all the safety measures in place"

Wendy Kendall, Sales Director, Legrand Assisted Living and Healthcare

References and Links:

BS 8604-1:2019 Social alarm systems. Design, installation and maintenance of social alarm systems in specialized grouped living environments.

BS EN 50134-7:2017 Alarm systems. Social alarm systems. Application guidelines

[TSA Quality Standards Framework](#)

[TSA Covid-19 Website Page](#)

[Industry Guidance](#)

[Infection Control & TEC Equipment Decontamination During COVID-19](#)

[Information on the Analogue to Digital Migration](#)



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