



Position Statement PS-01 Version 2.0

COVID-19 Level 4 Alert

Issued 18/08/21



NOTE: Please check <http://www.fireprotection.org.nz/online-resources/position-statements> to ensure you are using the latest version of this document



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Significant changes

from the previous version

(V1.1 Published - 6 April 2020)



- › Change of duration assumption in “scope”.
- › Added section with link to MBIE advice regarding disrupted BWoFs.
- › Reference to the Regulation temporarily suspending evacuation training and trial evacuations.
- › Updates to “underlying principles” and “essential businesses” to reflect changes to official definitions and further details from MBIE’s website.
- › Cross reference to safety procedures and protocols discussed in PS-02.
- › Minor updates and changes throughout, including referenced websites.



Scope

This Position Statement applies to all Fire Protection Association New Zealand (“FPANZ”) member activities for the duration of COVID-19 Alert Level 4 restrictions (“restrictions”) as defined at <https://covid19.govt.nz/>. This document represents the position of FPANZ on the subjects described as at the time of writing.

This is a fluid situation. A conservative approach has been taken based on the presumption that the Level 4 restrictions may be applied repeatedly for varying periods, short or long, and the Alert levels may be applied selectively to different regions of the country. If the official advice pertaining to Level 4 restrictions changes, the advice in this document may need to be revised.

All general instructions and advice at <https://covid19.govt.nz/> should be followed, in addition to the member-specific provisions of this document.

Background

The threat of the COVID-19 pandemic to our collective health and wellbeing is unprecedented in modern times.

In response to requests from FPANZ members, this series of documents has been prepared to assist with the specific application to the fire protection industry of the official guidance that has been published.

Disclaimer

This document has been prepared in good faith by FPANZ on a best-efforts basis, considering the situation and officially supplied information as at the time of writing. The contents of this document may be overtaken or rendered obsolete by subsequent events and/or official instructions.

Please check <http://www.fireprotection.org.nz/online-resources/position-statements> to ensure you are using the latest version of this document, or to access documents applicable to other Alert Level restrictions.

This document should not be relied upon as legal advice, nor should it be taken as permission to do anything that is obviously contrary to either the spirit or the letter of the restrictions.

Position of FPANZ

The position of FPANZ is as follows:



Follow Official Advice

All official advice published by the Government and its delegated agencies (MBIE, FENZ, Ministry of Health, Civil Defence etc.) should be followed by members. This advice changes over time and can be found in the following places (this is not an exhaustive list):

<https://covid19.govt.nz/alert-levels-and-updates/alert-level-4/>

<https://covid19.govt.nz/business-and-money/businesses/doing-business-at-alert-level-4/>

<https://www.business.govt.nz/covid-19/operating-at-alert-levels/>

<https://www.building.govt.nz/covid-19/essential-business/>

<https://www.building.govt.nz/covid-19/inspection-and-maintenance-of-specified-systems/>

<https://www.worksafe.govt.nz/managing-health-and-safety/novel-coronavirus-covid/>

<https://www.building.govt.nz/covid-19>

<https://covid19.govt.nz/>

Underlying principles – “essential” activity only

The COVID-19 restrictions are aimed at reducing the spread of disease, either directly from person to person or via contaminated surfaces.

At Level 4, FPANZ members should take all reasonable steps to minimise the health risk to their staff, themselves, their families, and the public. This should include the cessation of all non-essential public activity, working from home,

self-isolation, and when undertaking essential work: increased hygiene, mask-wearing, contact tracing, and physical distancing. Steps should also be taken to minimise the risk of COVID-19 spread from or to client or member premises.

The official permissions granted to the building sector, and its associated supply and support chain, are limited to activities “required to address immediate risks to health and safety”, activities required for “nationally important infrastructure that enables or supports supply chains... to provide for the current needs of people and communities, or to enable or support... recovery... from the effects of Covid-19”, or “businesses or services necessary to maintain other [permitted] alert level 4 businesses or services”. The list of permitted activities is extensive, but specific, and includes key utilities and media, national infrastructure, transportation, justice and some other government services, emergency services, food processing, distribution, supermarkets, dairies, and pharmacies (this is not an exhaustive list).

From earlier MBIE advice: “The situation is often changing, so you may not be clear on whether your business is essential. Some businesses will be deemed essential for a short period of time while supporting other essential businesses or while carrying out an essential service”.

A fire or sprinkler company is an essential business (delivering an essential service) during the time it is conducting an essential service, such as responding to defects or alarms, or undertaking time-critical maintenance or repair of systems in critical or occupied buildings. Outside of those times, it is not considered an essential business.

Position of FPANZ



There is no blanket designation. Each and every situation and activity must be assessed on its merits.

All members are reminded of their undertaking to follow FPANZ Code of Ethical Conduct. In the context of the current situation the following aspects are particularly relevant: Compliance, Responsibility to the Community, Health and Safety, Responsibility to the Industry and Association, and Integrity.

The public has shown a low tolerance of activities considered “non-essential”. Members should make every effort not only to fully comply with the Alert Level 4 restrictions, but also not to be seen to be “pushing the boundaries” with activities that are not really essential. Our collective professional reputation is at stake.

Essential Businesses and Services

The official definitions of what are colloquially called “essential businesses” and “essential services” (official title: “Alert Level 4 businesses and services”) are subject to change. The latest authoritative legal definitions are given in *Schedule 2 of the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Alert Level Requirements) Order (No 9) 2021* available in the Legislation and Key Documents section of <https://covid19.govt.nz/>.

A simplified summary from MBIE can also be found at <https://www.building.govt.nz/covid-19/alert-level-4/>.

From that website:

- ▶ *To help you identify work that meets the Covid-19 Alert Level 4 building, construction and maintenance business and service definition, ask yourself the following questions:*
 - 1a) *Is the work required to address immediate risks to health and safety? And/or*
 - 1b) *Is the work required for nationally important infrastructure? And*
 - 1c) *Does the infrastructure enable or support supply chains that are needed to provide for the current needs of people and communities, or enable or support the immediate recovery of the whole or any part of New Zealand from the effects of COVID-19? Or*
 - 1d) *Is the work required to undertake statutory responsibilities for building and resource consenting that is necessary to enable the building, construction, and maintenance services for the purposes stated above?*
- 2) *Is the work you are performing the bare minimum required to meet the criteria above?*
- ▶ *If your work meets this criteria it may be permitted, however it is important to assess your specific situation and satisfy yourself that the criteria in the Government definition of Alert Level 4 Building, construction and maintenance business and service has been met.*

Position of FPANZ



And helpfully, under “examples of work that meets Covid-19 Alert Level 4 criteria”:

Occupation	Examples of essential work	Non-essential work
Fire service technicians	Remediating a defect for a fire alarm or sprinkler in an occupied building.	Testing fire alarm systems in an unoccupied building.
	Responding to a request from FENZ to attend a system during an emergency call out.	
Specified Systems	Work to ensure specified systems remain operational if they are necessary to maintain health and safety and to continue the operation of nationally important infrastructure or to address immediate risks to health and safety	

The FPANZ position is that unless it is obvious (for example hospital, supermarket, occupied hotel, care facility, court, critical infrastructure) the onus is on your client to demonstrate to you that they are providing an essential service – either directly, or as part of the supply and support chain for an essential business. You should ask for objective evidence in support of this if you have any cause for doubt.

Again, from MBIE:

“The intent of this permissible activity is to allow genuinely urgent work to proceed. Any work that can be delayed, should be delayed, to minimise the risk of person to person transmission of COVID-19.

” *“You should consider, in good faith and in the interests of Aotearoa New Zealand, whether:*

- *the building work or the infrastructure is necessary for the supply chain?*
- *there are any time sensitivities around the operation of the supply chain?*
- *doing the work now would have a meaningful impact on the ability of the supply chain to effectively support COVID-19 recovery?*

- *the work is genuinely urgent for the supply chain?”*

Managing infection risk on customer sites

Fire industry contractors should contact each client site owner representative to discuss the infection risk posed by essential on-site activities to both fire industry workers and the building occupants versus the risk of the system not functioning. Together you should establish safe and appropriate procedures which address and reduce these risks to a mutually-acceptable level. Some panels and pumps, for instance, can be accessed from outside or without the need for a technician to enter occupied areas, whereas in other buildings a technician may need to enter occupied and even clinical areas.

Please see *FPANZ Position Statement PS-02 – COVID-19 Level 3 Alert* for suggested approaches to conducting essential work “safely”. This includes links to helpful SiteSafe and CHASNZ protocols.

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Fire Alarm and Sprinkler System Maintenance – General

MBIE has advised that it is permissible to perform “some repair and minimal maintenance” to keep specified systems operational in occupied buildings and buildings that “enable the continued operation of essential services and critical infrastructure”. Buildings in these categories that are not defect monitored remotely may be “checked” at “minimum frequency necessary”.

FPANZ has received feedback from the owners of some critical facilities that their testing regime is not to be curtailed during the Level 4 restrictions. Specific examples include DHBs who require that their diesel driven fire pumps are tested weekly, as against the implied monthly testing of earlier MBIE advice. FPANZ agrees that such routine testing in critical and essential facilities should continue unabated.

In FPANZ’s view, examples of critical facilities would include hospitals, key utilities (e.g. telecommunications, data centres, water treatment plants, power stations, oil & gas installations, waste treatment), facilities where liberties are restricted (care, detention, managed isolation, quarantine), and emergency services premises (again, this is not an exhaustive list).

Members should not take any of this as permission to undertake non-essential maintenance, nor should members ask Territorial Authorities or FENZ for dispensations from regulatory requirements – they have no legal power to grant them.

Weekly/Monthly Testing

In light of the MBIE advice above, routine testing should be suspended temporarily in unoccupied and non-essential buildings. In essential but non-critical buildings this testing should be delayed and simplified to the level and frequency you consider, in your professional judgement, based on the system’s prior history, to be the minimum reasonably necessary to maintain continued operation. Testing in critical buildings (as per the section above) may be conducted at normal intervals, but possibly adapted to reduce infection risk. Members should be aware that they may be called upon to publicly justify any judgements made.

Annual/Biennial Surveys

In light of the MBIE advice above, annual and biennial surveys should be suspended temporarily in all buildings. Such surveys are a high-infection-risk activity because they require all areas of the premises to be accessed.

Alarm and Sprinkler System Activations and Defects

The underlying principle is that tradespeople are only permitted to undertake emergency work where the need is immediate and required to address risks to health and safety.

MBIE has clarified that responding to alarm or defect notifications from fire alarm or sprinkler systems in occupied buildings, essential services buildings, and critical infrastructure are all considered to be essential service.

Furthermore, MBIE has stated that essential service also includes a member responding to a request from Fire and Emergency New Zealand

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for an emergency call out to any building (this may include unoccupied buildings).

Building Construction Sites

A very small number of construction sites are formally designated by Government agencies as essential or critical, and members may work on these sites. All other construction sites should be closed.

Fire Alarm and Sprinkler System Commissioning Inspections

On-site commissioning inspections should be temporarily suspended except for the very small number of construction sites formally designated by Government agencies as essential or critical.

Maintenance of Evacuation Schemes and Fire Safety Training

Carrying out fire evacuation drills and face-to-face training are considered high-infection-risk activities and should be temporarily suspended. Training delivery online or via video conference may be considered in consultation with your client.

The Fire and Emergency New Zealand (COVID-19 – Fire Safety, Evacuation Procedures, and Evacuation Schemes) Amendment Regulations (No 2) 2020 suspend the legal requirements for evacuation training programmes and the conduct of trial evacuations whenever official physical distancing requirements are in place. They also exempt managed isolation and quarantine facilities.

Hand-operated Firefighting Equipment (HOFFE) Maintenance and Service

HOFFE maintenance and service work should be limited to the recharge, replacement, and repair of equipment to support essential businesses and critical infrastructure only. For other situations it should be temporarily suspended unless there is an immediate risk to human health or safety.

Routine Inspections of Fire Extinguishers and Other HOFFE

Routine HOFFE inspections should be temporarily suspended in all situations. This is a high-infection-risk activity because it requires large areas of the premises to be accessed..

Inspections for Passive Fire Protection, Means of Escape, Emergency Signage

Routine inspections should be temporarily suspended in all situations. Such inspections are a high-infection-risk activity because they require all areas of the premises to be accessed. Essential work may be undertaken to support an essential business, or where there is a known and immediate life safety risk (e.g. a jammed fire door in an egress route of an occupied building).



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Fire Product Manufacturing and Supply

Advice from MBIE is that fire products are part of the supply chain for essential businesses, so manufacture and supply may continue to the extent necessary to supply critical products and services to essential businesses only.

Communication with Clients

Members should communicate proactively with their clients so that they are fully informed about the implications of the above restrictions for both their premises and their Health and Safety responsibilities.

BWoFs and Specified Systems

Please refer to the following MBIE webpage for detailed advice regarding the management of disrupted BWoF responsibilities:

<https://www.building.govt.nz/covid-19/inspection-and-maintenance-of-specified-systems/>

This website contains links to templates for Building System and Specified System Status Reports (BSSR and SSSR) that can be issued in lieu of a Form 12A where COVID-19 restrictions have prevented scheduled maintenance, inspection, or reporting being carried out.

Note also MBIE's advice about the possible need to inspect and test specified systems in unoccupied buildings prior to their reoccupation.

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