



Scottish
Forestry
Coilltearachd
na h-Alba

Covid-19 Forestry Sector Restart & Resilience Plan

Scottish Forestry is the Scottish Government agency responsible for
forestry policy, support and regulation

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Covid-19 Forestry Sector Restart & Resilience Plan

1. Introduction

This plan sets out the Scottish Government's approach to restarting the whole forestry sector and outdoor environmental management. It aims to get the sector fully going again within the parameters of the Scottish Government route map and phasing and seeks to create more resilience in the sector. This will then lead to the development of a recovery plan.

Some parts of the sector have remained operational in order to provide essential products. This plan supports the wider sector as it restarts as well. Once the sector has restarted then the focus can shift to recovery and wider resilience. This is Scottish appropriate guidance, and while the easing of restrictions may be different in different parts of the UK, Scottish Government has been working closely with the other national administrations, Confor and Forest Industry Safety Accord to ensure common protocols for safe working across the forestry sector.

Restart is likely to be possible only on a phased basis, and subject to three pillars:

- assessment of the success of measures to suppress the virus and to prevent a resurgence, including the ability to test, trace and isolate further cases effectively.
- having the right structures in place for advice, compliance and building resilience within sectors considered for phased restarting;
- having in place a solid framework of guidance to support fair and safe working in all workplaces and sectors.

Work to put these pillars in place will allow the Scottish Government to make considered decisions on where and when business activity can restart safely. This will require judgements not only about specific business sectors but also about wider economic and social benefits and the potential impact on critical public health risks. Initial assessments focus on the construction, manufacturing and retail sectors, where less work can be done remotely, as well as elements of outdoor and rural work, where transmission risks are likely to be lower.

In addition to this plan, guidance on ['Working Safely During Coronavirus \(Covid-19\) in Forestry'](#) has been developed by the Forest Industry Safety Accord (FISA) to provide more details regarding safe working practices and the risk assessment process to take into account Covid19. This guidance is the result of a strong partnership approach to its development, and the involvement of employee representative bodies in that process.

Forestry businesses operating in Scotland should make themselves familiar with this plan, the FISA guidance and the [Scottish Government's Framework For Decision Making](#) which outlines the broader Scottish Government principles. It is essential that businesses undertake fair and participatory employee engagement when planning to restart operations.

The Scottish forestry sector provides jobs and economic activity in rural locations, captures carbon emissions, improves biodiversity, and provides much valued public access to high quality green spaces. This plan is about restoring the delivery of these outcomes in a measured and safe manner, with broad support from employers, people who work in the sector and the wider communities where forestry operations take place.

Decisions on restarting business, and other possible variations to the existing restrictions, could have wider consequences for other services and sectors, for example in the demand for public transport and the consequences for school attendance. The Scottish Government is taking into account and monitoring these wider system effects in reaching decisions. It will continue to monitor and manage this with sector leaders and others, including through more detailed assessment of conditions in different parts of Scotland and in the infrastructure and supporting services on which businesses and communities rely, including transport.

Restrictions are likely to remain in place for some business activity for some time to come, especially where safe working is harder to achieve. Changes already adopted in many sectors, for example working from home and the use of digital technology, are likely to persist as part of the “new normal.”

2. Restarting the Forestry Sector

Scottish Government published ‘Scotland’s Route Map through and out of the crisis’ as part of its COVID-19 – [Framework for Decision Making](#) on 21 May. This route map sets out a five phased approach to easing lockdown restrictions while still suppressing coronavirus (COVID-19).

The route map provides an indication of the order in which Scottish Government will carefully and gradually seek to lift current restrictions, but does not attempt to specify dates for all of the different phases. Decisions to move from one phase to the next will be based on meeting particular criteria, including those set by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The forestry sector is covered by Phase 1 of the Route Map (Non-essential outdoor workplaces with physical distancing resume once relevant guidance agreed), and phase 2 (Non-essential indoor, non-office-based workplaces resume once relevant guidance agreed – including factories & warehouses, lab & research facilities – to re-open with physical distancing) with Lockdown being Phase Zero. Many indoor workplaces have continued to operate safely in the forestry sector to ensure supply of essential goods, including pallets and biofuels.

Scottish Forestry, Confor and Forestry and Land Scotland have worked in partnership to develop this concise and specific plan covering the reset, restart and recovery phases for the forestry sector that is consistent with and linked to broader rural and national economic Plans. A plan that has broad support across the sector and that has been agreed by the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism, building on the SG Covid19 Framework for Decision Making.

Forestry contributes £1 billion per annum to Scotland’s economy and supports 25,000 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs. This economic activity is spread right across Scotland and can be a key part of the local economies of remote rural locations. Forestry not only provides jobs but also locations for recreation and biodiversity. Trees are an efficient method of carbon sequestration and for this reason, new woodland creation and the increase of timber used in construction are included within the Climate Change Plan.

Parts of the forestry sector have maintained production through lockdown as their products have been essential to managing the Covid19 crisis, for example, pallet production in order to maintain the delivery of products, biomass for heating and some panel board operations in

order to supply products for the new emergency hospitals. Since these processors need wood to operate, harvesting and haulage has also had to continue, albeit at lower than normal levels. These operations have shown that it is possible for the forestry sector to operate safely within the existing restrictions imposed by Covid19.

The operations that have continued have provided important lessons for the rest of the forestry sector. The Forestry Industry Safety Accord (FISA) has worked with the public and private sectors and trades unions to develop risk assessments that will mean common safe working practices across the UK forestry sector. The Confederation of Timber Industries (Confor) and the Timber Packaging and Pallet Confederation (TimCon) have been working with their members together with Scottish and UK Governments to develop best practice guidelines for the forestry processing sector.

A phased restart, with continual feedback and evaluation, compliance monitoring and accordance with Fair Work principles is the right thing to do. Forestry is a long term business, hence delays to operations now can have impacts that will last for years. In order to contribute to the 'Green recovery' and to Scotland's climate change targets, forestry needs to operate.

The Strategic Timber Transport Fund will provide £7 million funding to the public and private sectors to take timber off roads where possible, or provide other environmental or community benefits. Projects are co-financed and mostly include improvements to minor rural roads and promote the transport of timber by sea.

3. Covid-19 A Framework For Decision Making - Scottish Government principles:

Safe

We will ensure that transmission of the virus remains suppressed and that our NHS and care services are not overwhelmed.

Any guidance should recognise the importance of social distancing and hand washing hygiene. Wherever possible, staff who can work from home should work from home, and anyone showing signs of illness or Covid-19 symptoms must be sent home immediately.

Many forestry activities, such as site survey, inspections, ground preparation, planting, etc. take place outside in ways that are already physically distanced. Development of **Covid-19 safe working practices** are largely focused on modifying those elements that involve less physical distancing, such as travel to and from remote sites, the provision of welfare facilities on site, and procedure for the transfer of paperwork and goods. All guidance highlights the importance of **compliance with social distancing guidance and hand washing hygiene.**

Lawful

We will respect the rule of law which will include ensuring that any restrictions are justified, necessary and proportionate.

Forestry has long experience of managing risk with FISA as the co-ordinating body for health and safety, and HSE as the regulator. FISA has established a Covid-19 Working Group comprising representatives from across the private and public sectors and involving HSE to provide oversight of development of Covid-19 safe working practices. **Control measures to meet current Covid-19 regulations and guidelines to reduce the possibilities of infection have been incorporated into site based risk assessments**, thereby maintaining connection with broader Health and Safety measures and avoiding separate documents.

Evidence-based

We will use the best available evidence and analysis.

The Chief Statistician & Joint Head of Covid Modelling and Analysis's specific advice on transmission of the virus for forestry workers provided on 10 May is that **"where people are outside and physically distancing the increase in transmission is very low.** There is good evidence that virus transmission occurs through multiple people touching the same hard surfaces. If this could be avoided in the workplace, then I'd suggest that transmission for this group would be very low." As the understanding of Covid-19 increases and government advice changes, guidance will be updated and communicated via Scottish Government and the trade bodies communication channels.

Fair & Ethical

We will uphold the principles of human dignity, autonomy, respect and equality.

The principles of human dignity, autonomy, respect and equality will be assured through carrying out equality impact assessments on the actions to support this plan as required. **It is important that workers feel safe, valued and respected as they come back to work** and that they understand how the new working environment will keep them and their families safe. SF and FLS are engaging with their union representatives who in turn are **engaged with trade union officials** as per normal practice. Clear communication and training will be provided to ensure that new working procedures are well understood by everybody, including visitors.

Clear

We will provide clarity to the public to enable compliance, engagement and accountability.

As the forestry sector picks up, the public will notice renewed activity in and around forests, and rightly seek reassurance that unnecessary risks are not been taken. SF, Confor and FLS will provide clear communications to **provide reassurance to the public, stakeholders and worker in the sector that activity is low risk** through effective communication, engagement and accountability.

Realistic

We will consider the viability and effectiveness of options.

Not all forestry involves working outside where transition risks are low and is undertaken in environments where there could be a high risk of contact, such as in offices or on production lines. Where possible, people will continue to work from home. Work is ongoing across Scottish Government to develop **guidance on how best to modify working environments where contact might occur to reduce the risk of infection to workers**, including consideration of what to do if something goes wrong, or if there is an accident. The forestry sector will adopt such guidance as appropriate.

Collective

The Scottish Government is working with the UK and Welsh Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive, taking action collectively on a four nations basis where it is appropriate to do so.

The forestry sector will work with a wide range of partners and stakeholders, including the UK Government and other Devolved Nations, to ensure that **the specific needs of Scotland are met**.

4. Safe Working Practice

Guidance on safe working practices will support businesses to implement effective measures to prevent Covid-19 infection that focus on:

- ensuring the workforce understand the symptoms of Covid-19 and when and how to self-isolate;
- how to implement and maintain 'physical distancing' on worksites;
- when PPE may be required and how to manage its use;
- ensuring that effective personal and occupational hygiene measures are implemented on work sites.

FISA is working with the public sector forestry organisations and the private sector across the UK and has developed safe working practices that have been quality assured by the HSE. Any risk assessment should follow best practice and consider the following elements:

Plan, Do, Check, Act	Conventional health and safety management	Process safety
Plan	Determine your policy/Plan for implementation	Define and communicate acceptable performance and resources needed
Do	Profile risks/Organise for health and safety/Implement your plan	Identify and assess risks/Identify controls/Record and maintain process safety knowledge
		Implement and manage control measures
Check	Measure performance (monitor before events, investigate after events)	Measure and review performance/Learn from measurements and findings of investigations
Act	Review performance/Act on lessons learned	

Risk assessments should follow [HSE guidance](#).

Specific measures for Covid-19 including those on face masks, hand wash/social distancing/first aid cover etc. are available at the [HSE website](#).

There is ongoing work with representatives from other UK administrations to ensure a consistent approach to safe working practice throughout the UK, for example through collaboration over the [generic work practice guidance](#) being developed for UK Government by BEIS.

An overview of progress with production of safe working guidance for different stages of the forestry lifecycle has been developed, including identification of specific issues for attention and the control measures to address them. This will be used to ensure that any further issues are picked up and addressed as appropriate.

5. Providing reassurance

It will be essential to demonstrate that the forestry sector is acting responsibly at all times to the wider public as well as those working in the sector. Many forestry-based activities take place outdoors, and in places that are accessible and visible to local communities. Actively explaining the importance of these activities, highlighting the measures being taken to remove any additional risk of virus transmission and being open and transparent about safe working will be a key element of this recovery plan.

Clear communication and information sharing between the forestry sector, its representative bodies, staff and their representatives and government will be required. Best practice can be quickly shared and potential problems resolve more quickly if the sector takes a collective approach alongside the public sector to this problem.

- Highlighting links to the existing Scottish Forestry Strategy, and the opportunity to maintain or even accelerate progress towards those goals.
- Lessons learned and how to improve the resilience of the forestry sector as part of re-start.

Scottish Forestry will lead on wider consultation on the Plan and its dissemination, taking partnership approach at all times.

Confor will lead on communication of messages and actions arising from the plan, taking a partnership approach at all times.

6. Key External Partners and Stakeholders

External Partners:

- Forestry Contracting Association – As the representative body for contractor base, it has a membership mainly from small businesses particularly involved with harvesting.
- FISA - As a forestry specific safety body is able to offer help and information with industry guidance for safe working in relation to Covid-19, particularly in reviewing and making more generic guidance more forestry specific. It is recognised by the HSE as the body for health and safety in the forestry sector. FISA can also assist with communicating safety messages to the wider industry with a membership of almost 1,000 throughout the UK and Ireland, sharing of safety procedures will be particularly important for the UK forestry industry with timber and labour regularly moving across all regions. A clear message for all will benefit those in Scotland and the wider industry.
- HSE – The Health and Safety Executive has the statutory responsibility of Health and Safety across all sectors.
- Scottish Forest and Timber Technologies Industry Leadership Group – consists of all the major forestry companies, enterprise agencies and representative bodies in Scotland.
- The list will be reviewed and further partners added as they are identified.

Stakeholders:

- Confor members – the main forestry sector trade body covering forest owners, nurseries, managers, hauliers, and processors.
- TimCon – pallet and wood packaging manufacturers
- Renewable Heat Association – representing companies that operate in the wood based biomass sector.
- Forestry Trade Unions Scotland (FTUS) – represent the SF and FLS workforce. Their concerns will reflect concerns amongst workers in the wider sector.
- The list will be reviewed and further stakeholders added as they are identified.

Scottish Forestry, Confor and Forest and Land Scotland will continue to work closely with DEFRA, WAG, NI with the aim of developing consistency across the UK as far as possible.

7. Next Steps

COVID-19: A Framework for Decision Making sets out the steps required for a managed transition out of lockdown. That framework recognises the need for a range of public health measures to be deployed to enable us to ensure low levels of community transmission of the disease.

One of these public health measures is the [Test and Protect approach](#). This approach is designed to help us interrupt chains of transmission in the community by identifying cases of COVID-19, tracing the people who may have become infected by spending time in close contact with them, and then supporting those close contacts to self-isolate, so that if they have the disease they are less likely transmit to it to others.

This plan will continue to evolve as restart and recovery progress to ensure continued safe working and to set out actions to improve the resilience of Scotland's forestry sector. In doing so it will draw on and help develop actions identified by the Industry Leadership Group.