

Rachel Reeves MP
Chair, Business Select Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1 0AA

3 April 2020

By Email

Dear Rachel

Covid-19: Social distancing in the workplace

I recently wrote to you outlining the steps that Hermes is taking during the current Covid-19 crisis to protect couriers and consumers through contactless parcel delivery and shared details of our fund to financially support couriers unable to work.

I now want to update you on the steps we are taking to in our sites around the UK to keep people safe and ensure social distancing measures are in place.

As you will know those businesses operating in the postal sector have been designated an essential service during this pandemic. Our employees working in our parcel sorting hubs and depots, plus the self-employed couriers delivering parcels are critical to our business continuity and have been designated as key workers.

Parcel processing sites:

In our hubs, depots and sub depots, we have implemented measures to ensure that the government guidelines are being adhered to and we have site specific risk assessments incorporating new safe systems of work to mitigate the Covid-19 risk. These new health and safety documents have been shown and briefed to all workers at our sites, been included in all induction packs for new starters and have been shared with the agencies providing staff to Hermes.

Specific steps we are taking at our sites:

- Applying highly visible black and tape to flooring, clearly defining the two-metre gap required between workers;
- Dividing warehouse floor space into zones so people are limited to a specific working area, reducing the contact between people and allowing a social distance of two metres to be achieved.
- Using fork lift trucks or pallet trucks in place of manual handling jobs which require two people.
- Displaying posters setting out government guidance across our sites, including extensive advice on washing hands properly.
- Providing latex and non-latex gloves for all employees and couriers.

- Sending sites alcohol-based hand sanitiser gel and cleaning wipes so that equipment and vehicles can be wiped down after use. For our HGV's we are encouraging drivers to use the same vehicles to reduce any risk or cross contamination.
- Splitting breaks to reduce the amount of people congregating in a single space and using training rooms to provide additional break out spaces.
- Closing alternate toilet cubicles and hand basins at our sites to allow social distances to be maintained when workers are washing hands and using toilets.
- Increasing the frequency of cleaning at our sites and arranging for external suppliers to be on call to deliver intensive cleaning where necessary.
- Providing cleaning kits to our sub depots which contain cleaning wipes, concentrated bleach and spray bottles in addition to alcohol-based hand sanitiser gel and gloves.
- Ensuring staff who need to work at a desk at our operational sites sit at desks that maintain at least two metres separation.

I have attached some photographs which show the measures we have taken on site.

We have been working collaboratively with USDAW (Hermes' recognised trade union for warehouse employees) representatives at sites so that the measures we introduce meet their requirements. We have also been in close contact with our National Officer to ensure that he is clear on what we are doing. We are working well with USDAW and they are happy with our approach.

Head office sites:

All but one of our three head office buildings are closed, with virtually all employees working from home and provided with laptops and mobile phones to facilitate this. The remaining site is open to allow key IT infrastructure to be maintained by a small number of key workers and to allow for additional laptops to be prepared for sending out to enable employees to work from home. There are also small teams working on hardwired computers that are needed in our finance function. All those employees working at head office sit at desks that maintain at least two metres separation.

Contactless courier delivery:

As a reminder, all deliveries by couriers will be contactless during Covid-19. We are encouraging consumers to divert their parcels to a preferred 'safe place'. The courier will then leave a calling card alerting the consumer that their parcel is at the safe place.

For those deliveries where a consumer has not selected a diversion to a safe place, we have made some temporary changes to the signature process to ensure that contact between couriers and customers is eliminated. Couriers will leave parcels on the doorstep and knock on the door, then step back at least 2 metres. If the consumers answers and collects the parcel, the courier will sign on their behalf if a signature is needed. If no one is home, the courier will take the parcel and attempt redelivery another time.

We have been working with GMB representatives (the trade union we recognise for self-employed couriers providing services to Hermes) so that we understand the concerns of couriers and can adapt courier practices and practices at sub-depots (where couriers collect their parcels) to ensure they are kept safe.

Sub depot sites

We have issued the following specific advice for our sub-depots:

1. Stop all cage to cage scanning to reduce the time spent in the sub depot and reduce crowding;
2. Sub depot controllers should no longer press the “confirm” – button on the Courier HHT although the Sub depot controller should witness this being done and discuss any issues;
3. Allocating time slots and specifying the numbers of couriers in sub depots at any given time to reduce crowding and ensure that the 2m distance can be complied with;
4. Prior to their designated collection slot, couriers should stay in their cars, they should not walk around or enter the site to reduce the number of people in the sub depot;
5. Couriers have been advised they must not stay in the sub depot or car parks to sort their parcels, they need to load and go;
6. Where required, sub depot controllers should extend the opening hours of the sub depot to reduce crowding and spread out the number of couriers on site at any one time;
7. Marking should be placed on the floor of the sub depot where courier cage to be placed (see the attached photo), once the courier arrives the courier should wait until the sub depot controller has placed the cage within the marked position, the sub depot controller should then stand back and allow the courier to collect the cage. At all times a distance of 2m should be observed;
8. All cages should be cleaned down after use with cleaning materials.

We are checking compliance with these requirements across all sub-depots.

Online delivery:

I want to reassure you that Hermes takes the safety and wellbeing of our employees and couriers in this current situation extremely seriously. The service that we and other postal operators provide is especially important during this time and it is vital that our operations and those of online retailers can continue in a safe way, enabling the people to follow government guidance and stay at home.

Some online retailers have taken the difficult decision to close warehouses temporarily, but most have chosen to remain open and implement social distancing measures similar to those we have set out.

There have been concerns from trades unions and some workers that people should not be buying non-essential items and putting others at risk. Items that may be viewed by one person as essential, may be seen as non-essential by another. There has been criticism of people buying clothes or

household items, but some people are trying to support retailers, large and small, during this tough time and others are finding some small joy in still being able to shop while they are required to stay at home for an indefinite period. We have seen a significant increase in our ‘Hermes Send’ network of parcel volumes from small businesses.

The government has been clear in its support for online retail and its view that delivery services are critical to helping people get through this challenging time. We would urge you to encourage unions to work with retailers and delivery companies to ensure they are applying strict social distancing measures and providing a safe environment for their workforce. This will support retailers and delivery companies, preserving jobs, help the economy and enable people to stay home and buy the items they need online.

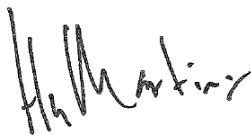
It is during these unprecedented times that the business community comes together to support each other. In the past two weeks Hermes has been working with Asda and Morrisons using our

transportation services to collect food and other supplies from their distribution centres and transport it to supermarkets to help with the huge increase in demand in stores.

We have also registered on the Cabinet Office database to offer our services in transporting goods to hospitals. We are ready and willing to play our part in supporting our NHS at this challenging time.

We continue to keep our advice and safety measures under daily review, following the latest government guidance and to ensure site audits check compliance with the measures we have introduced. I would be happy to answer any further questions you may have.

Yours sincerely



Hugo Martin
Director of Legal and Public Affairs