# Background:

A number of documents have been published in recent weeks relating to the appointment of workers to assist in the implementation and monitoring of adherence to COVID-19 control measures. This paper aims to bring clarity to the origins of titles used, and the approach adopted within the Office of Public Works to meet the requirements.

# Timeline of Publications:

2***3rd March 2020:*** The Construction Industry Federation published guidance on **Social Distancing for COVID-19** (CIF-COVID\_H&S\_05). This document recommended that employers consider appointing a person to “*specifically monitor adherence to social distancing*”.

***14th April 2020:*** The Construction Industry Federation published the **Construction Sector C-19 Pandemic Standard Operating Procedures**, requiring the appointment of COVID-19 Compliance Officers from both the management team and contractors/subcontractors.

The C-19 Compliance Officer’s role is to “…monitor day-to-day site activities to ensure social distancing and hygiene rules are being maintained…” The duties can be summarised as:

* Ensuring personnel comply with COVID-19 control measures
* Maintaining a log of regular monitoring
* Ensuring there is sufficient up-to-date signage on site
* Promoting good hygiene practices
* Ensuring welfare facilities are cleaned and handwashing facilities are available.
* Making representation to management regarding C-19 concerns raised by personnel,
* Reporting any areas of non-compliance
* Considering provision of additional controls and
* Keeping up to date with HSE guideline
* Reacting to suspected/confirmed cases of Covid-19.

***9th May 2020:*** The ‘**Return to Work Safely Protocol: – COVID-19 Specific National Protocol for Employers and Workers**’ was launched requiring each workplace to “*appoint at least one lead worker representative charged with ensuring that COVID-19 measures are strictly adhered to in their place of work.*

The protocol states that the role of this person(s) is to:

* *work collaboratively with the employer to assist in the implementation of measures;*
* *monitor adherence to the measures to prevent the spread of COVID -19; and*
* *together with the COVID-19 response management team, support the implementation of the measures identified in this national protocol.*

Furthermore it requires that the “*number of worker representatives for COVID-19 appointed will, ideally, be proportionate to the number of workers in the workplace and this person should be clearly identifiable in the workplace.” It also requires that “The person(s) undertaking the role must receive the necessary training and have a structured framework to follow within the organisation to be effective in preventing the spread of the virus”*

**14th May 2020:** Version 4 of the ‘**NSAI COVID-19 Workplace Protection and Improvement Guide’** was updated to*“The Lead Worker Representative is an employee whose role is to work with the employer to assist in the implementation of the measures identified in the Return to Work safely Protocol.*

Note this document also requires the appointment of a COVID-19 Coordinator who *“is the lead person from the employer side who is responsible for the planning and coordinating of COVID-19 activities.”*

***18th/19th May 2020:*** The Health & Safety Authority published a series of COVID-19 checklists. **Checklist No. 7: Worker Representative** poses a series of questions for use for educational purposes. A review of this checklist is provided in Appendix I.

# Title of Worker Representatives:

Appointments of designated persons to assist in the implementation of COVID-19 control measures through monitoring of adherence commenced in advance of and since the publication of the National Protocol. Various titles were used including Covid-19 Compliance Officer, COVID-19 Warden, and COVID-19 Compliance Warden, Worker Representative.

While the previously mentioned titles may appear in documents such as risk assessments, toolbox talks etc., or be used locally across the organisation, the role and duties of this function are the same.

For the avoidance of doubt, the term ‘**Worker Representative’** will be used in the OPW to describe this role and for the remainder of this document.

# Appointment of Worker Representatives

Due to the wide range of workplace environments and roles across the Office, the OPW considers that a number of Worker Representatives are required to be appointed across its various workplaces. Depending on the workplace, more than one person may be appointed, or in some cases, a person who will act as an alternate if required.

Staff members appointed to carry out this role may include any staff member who is representative of and for the staff.

# Role & Responsibilities of the Worker Representative

The Role of the Worker Representative is to:

* Work collaboratively with the OPW Management to assist in the implementation of measures;
* Monitor adherence to the measures to prevent the spread of COVID -19; and
* Support the implementation of the identified measures.

The proposed responsibilities of the Worker Representative are to:

* Monitor the day-to-day work activities within their designated area, to support management in ensuring that COVID-19 control measures are being maintained, in order to protect health and reduce the risk of spread of the COVID-19 virus.
* Assist management and workers in complying with the physical distancing rules and good hygiene practices.
* Follow the framework[[1]](#footnote-1) provided by the OPW, which will be reviewed regularly and updated as required.
* Ensure that they do not put themselves at risk while carrying out their duties.
* Complete relevant COVID-19 Checklists
* Check that appropriate contact logs are maintained.
* Promote and monitor compliance with HSE guidelines, and good hygiene practices.
* Check that there is sufficient up-to-date signage erected, in order to inform all personnel about the COVID-19 controls on site.
* Check that regular cleaning is undertaken, of welfare facilities - handrails, door handles, tools, etc.
* Check that water and hand-drying facilities are available, and soap and hand sanitisers are replenished as required.
* Check that site/ office personnel are adhering to break time schedules and limiting numbers in canteens, drying rooms and smoking areas - cognisant of the 2-metre physical distancing guideline.
* Report any areas of non-compliance or defects to management and follow-up with management, where necessary.
* Keep up to date with HSE guidelines.
* Inform site management of any concerns raised by site personnel.
* Consider recommendations for improvements of existing controls and/or provision of additional controls and discuss with management.

Where the role is not filled by a Safety Representative:

* Engage with elected safety representatives to ensure any concerns or recommendations for improvements they are aware of are communicated to management and followed-up on.

**Note:** Additional duties may be added and communicated to Worker Representatives in line with Government /OPW updates.

All Worker Representatives are required to carry out their responsibilities cognisant of the need at times for discretion and confidentiality.

# Training and Structured Framework

Training is to be provided to all Worker Representatives, and, in order to ensure a consistent standard of training is provided with a consistent message, a toolbox talk and PowerPoint presentation has been developed by the Office. The training outlines the roles and responsibilities of the Worker Representative, and will be the main mechanism used by the OPW to provide the relevant and necessary training.

Training requirements will be kept under review as the protocol progresses through the various stages.

The toolbox talk will be used with reference to the relevant section’s COVID-19 induction material, COVID-19 Risk Assessments, and appropriate checklists.

Section/ work environment specific checklists will be developed as required, and provide a consistent and structured approach for the Worker Representatives to monitor and record details of compliance.

Existing communication frameworks relating to Safety Representatives and Safety Committees will be utilised, where applicable.

# Appendix I – Review of HSA Worker Representative Checklist ([link](https://www.hsa.ie/eng/topics/covid-19/return_to_work_safely_templates_and_checklists/worker_representative_checklist_no_71.pdf))

| **No.** | **H.S.A. Checklist Question** | **OPW Response** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. | Have you agreed with your employer or manager to act as a Worker Representative for your workplace or work area? | Worker Representatives will be appointed by management |
| 2. | Have you been provided with information and training in relation to the role of Worker Representative? | Workers Representative will be provided with information and training in relation to the role as outlined in Section 5 above. |
| 4. | Are you keeping up to date with the latest COVID-19 advice from Government? | Workers Representative are required to keep up to date with the latest COVID-19 advice from HSE Guidelines. |
| 5. | Are you aware of the [signs and symptoms of COVID-19](https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/symptoms.html)? | Worker Representatives are made aware of the signs and symptoms of COVID-19, and how it is spread through the COVID-19 induction material. |
| 6. | Do you know [how the virus is spread](https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/how-coronavirus-is-spread.html)? |
| 7. | Do you know how to help prevent the spread of COVID-19? | Worker Representatives are made aware of the public health measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 through COVID-19 induction material. |
| 8. | Have you been brought through an induction before returning to your workplace? | All staff receive COVID-19 Induction before returning to the workplace. |
| 9. | Are you helping in keeping your fellow workers up to date with the latest COVID-19 advice from Government? | Worker Representatives help keep fellow workers up to date with the latest COVID-19 advice from Government through making colleagues aware of the latest Covid-19 advice from Government. |
| 10. | Have you completed the COVID-19 return-to-work form and given it to your employer? | All staff returning to work from 18th May must complete the Return to Workplace form in advance of returning. |
| 11. | Are you aware of the control measures your employer has put in place to minimise the risk of you and others being exposed to COVID-19? | Worker Representatives are made aware of the control measures put in place minimise the risk of worker exposure to COVID-19 in advance of their return through induction material. |
| 12. | Did your employer consult with you when putting control measures in place? | Management will consult with Worker Representatives when putting control measures in place. |
| 13. | Have you a means of regular communication with your employer or manager? | In addition to structured reporting through existing frameworks, Worker Representatives have regular contact with management. |
| 14. | Are you co-operating with your employer to make sure these control measures are maintained? | Workers Representatives are required to monitor compliance, and report on non-compliance with measures. |
| 15. | Have you familiarised yourself with the cleaning requirements needed to help prevent cross contamination? | Cleaning requirements to help prevent cross contamination are detailed in COVID-19 induction material and COVID-19 Risk Assessments. |
| 16. | Have you been asked to walk around your workplace / work area daily and check that the control measures are in place and are being maintained? | Checklists will be developed to allow Worker Representatives check and record that the control measures are in place and are being maintained. |
| 17. | Are you reporting immediately to your employer / manager any problems, areas of non-compliance or defects that you see? | Worker representatives are required to report any non-compliances, and ensure they are addressed. |
| 18. | Are you keeping a record of any problems, areas of non-compliance or defects and what action was taken to remedy the issue? | Structures for recording non-conformances and corrective actions exist as part of the established management systems within the Organisation. |
| 19. | Are you familiar with what to do in the event of someone developing the symptoms of COVID-19 while at work? | Site specific response plans for dealing with a suspected case will be communicated to all staff, including Workers Representatives  The Worker Representative will not necessarily be involved in the management of a suspected case, however will be kept informed.  This will vary from site to site. |
| 20. | Are you co-operating with your employer in identifying an isolation area and a safe route to that area? |
| 21. | Are you helping, as part of the response team, in the management of someone developing symptoms of COVID-19 while at work? |
| 22. | Once the affected person has left the workplace, are you helping in assessing what follow-up action is needed? |
| 23. | Are you helping in maintaining the worker contact log? | Confirmation that the relevant form of contact log is being maintained is incorporated into the checklists. |
| 25. | Have you been made aware of any changes to the emergency plans or first aid procedures for your workplace? | Changes to emergency plans where relevant, will be communicated to Worker Representatives. COVID-19 Guidance For First Aid Responders outline the changes to first aid procedures |
| 26. | Are you making yourself available to fellow workers to listen to any COVID control concerns or suggestions they may have? | Worker Representatives are required to inform site management of any concerns or suggestions raised by site personnel, and feed back as required. |
| 27. | Are you raising those control concerns or suggestions with your employer or manager and feeding back the response to the worker who raised the issue? |
| 28. | Do you know what supports are available if you are feeling anxious or stressed and will you pass this information on to your fellow workers? | Workers are reminded in the COVID-19 Risk Assessment that the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS) provides guidance and support to staff who may be experiencing personal and /or work related difficulties, including mental health. |

1. Detailed in the COVID-19 induction material, risk assessments and checklists. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)