

COVID-19 AND WORKERS IN THE FORESTRY, WOOD PROCESSING AND NURSERIES SECTOR IN SCOTLAND

The UK Government has provided clear guidance that “with the exception of some non-essential shops and public venues, we are not asking any other businesses to close – indeed it is important for business to carry on.”

In Scotland, the vital role that forestry and the wood processing sector is playing in the current COVID-19 pandemic was highlighted by Rural Economy and Tourism Secretary, Fergus Ewing on (Thursday, 26 March).

Mr Ewing commended the important contribution that the sector is making in producing key products, such as pallets, packaging, biomass fuel and face masks, to help keep Scotland - and the UK - safe and well during these unprecedented times.

Mr Ewing said;

“In these challenging and difficult times, it is imperative that essential goods, such as food supplies and medicines, and biomass fuel for hospitals and care homes get to the places where they are needed. This needs pallet manufacture and woodfuel processing to continue.

“I am immensely proud that Scotland’s forestry and timber processing sectors are working closely together to play their part in fighting the impact of this virus.”

The planting, management and harvesting of trees is a largely rural industry, as is the growing of young trees in forest nurseries.

In our daily working lives, there is limited interaction with other people, and the sector is committed to working safely in accordance with government guidelines for employers and businesses on coronavirus (COVID-19)*, including social distancing, and in accordance with all existing health and safety standards.

Where workers can work from home they should. However, many forestry workers simply cannot work from home - including those growing young trees in nurseries and planting new forests and woods. In the longer-term, those young trees will be needed to help many businesses get back on their feet and, lest we forget, to support our ongoing climate change objectives.

It is important that these forestry and forest nursery workers are able to travel to work and to undertake their activities without harassment or obstruction.

The forestry, wood processing and nurseries sector takes its responsibilities seriously during this current outbreak. Further information is available at <http://www.confor.org.uk/covid-19/topics/key-workers/>

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*<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19>