



## Media Release

### Facilities Managers at the Frontline of Covid-19 Response

**20 April 2020**

As we get ready to move out of Alert Level 4, facilities managers are at the forefront of ensuring the country's buildings are safe for those allowed to return to work.

"As businesses prepare for returning to their buildings, facilities managers across New Zealand continue to play a vital frontline role in ensuring and enabling the operational health and safety of our workplaces and business environments," says Gillian Wess, CEO of FMANZ, the association representing facilities management professionals in Aotearoa.

Tasked with looking after the health, safety and wellbeing of building occupants and putting in place plans for emergencies, such as pandemics, Gillian says facilities managers are agile thinkers by nature.

New Zealand's Covid-19 response has required "extreme agility" from FM professionals says Paul Huggins, Managing Director of Cushman & Wakefield, a facilities management provider that contracts to businesses including a number deemed essential services, such as prisons and supermarkets.

"The level of notice to enter Level 4 was two working days and the interpretation from the business community varied even within sectors," he says. "Our teams had to implement rapid change and ramp up all communications to all parties with immediate effect. While this sounds terrible, it wasn't. The challenge was taken on incredibly well by all."

With notice from the Government that the country will move to Alert Level 3 on Tuesday 28 April, facilities managers around the country are busier than ever.

Paul says his teams have been checking and servicing critical plant, organising extensive cleaning regimes, looking at physical distancing reconfiguration of offices

and spaces and new ways of working "and trying to establish what the new normal should look like".

Contact tracing is also high on the agenda and Cushman & Wakefield is investigating new systems that incorporate social distancing and new hygiene methods. "Tech solutions around sanitation of high touch points and desk systems that isolate and protect employees will be high on the priority list as will new working from home policies to distance people."

Alongside the practical steps being taken to keep occupants safe, there is also a focus on mental wellbeing, says Paul. "How will the team feel about what is being done, is the cleaning due to risk or more about knowing the environment is ready and the peace of mind that goes with that?"

"The most important factor remains health and safety."

Chrissy Prescott is Property & Facilities Manager at Smales Farm, which has a number of tenants carrying out essential services under Level 4. Continuing to maintain, monitor and run infrastructure and building services to buildings has been vital to ensure these tenants, including Shorecare Urgent Care Clinic, could continue to operate safely under Level 4.

"Planning has involved more than 5,000 access cards being locked out, issuing permits to enter buildings, and adjusting cleaning levels for those still onsite," explains Chrissy. The FM team has also been assisting tenants with long term business planning and return to work policies.

Maree Le Comte, Director of Agile Property Management in Wellington, also manages buildings with essential services tenants including a pharmacy, a medical consultancy firm and a public transport operator.

Prior to lockdown, she had been communicating with tenants about what health and safety steps had been taken, such as running the central air conditioning plants on full fresh air (with any recirculation features disabled), a review of cleaning contracts, and a change to a daily disinfectant clean of touchpoints such as lift call buttons, stair handrails and toilet door handles.

"Once the lockdown was announced we communicated with tenants regarding the lockdown of the building on access control system and worked with contractors to make sure this happened."

Like all facilities managers, Maree has spent the past four weeks planning for life after Level 4. Practicalities to consider before allowing people back into a building include

running the air conditioning for a couple of days to get some warmth back into facilities; ensuring common areas are thoroughly cleaned; organising access cards for couriers rather than leaving entrance doors unlocked; and putting in place protocols for use of lifts, stairs, and other shared spaces.

If asked, she would also recommend tenants move away from agile working, i.e. people work at an allocated desk for the duration of the crisis; that all entry is by access card so visitors can be tracked; that they work out a roster for staff breaks to enable physical distancing to be maintained; and that meeting and board rooms are used as a workspace to assist with physical distancing.

Richard Wilson is Assets and Facilities Management Team Leader at Dunedin City Council. The Council's property team manages more than 1000 buildings across the social housing, heritage, arts and culture, recreation, industrial and commercial sectors.

"As well as looking after security and essential maintenance during lockdown, the FM team is starting to think about how we can make our facilities safe as we come out of lockdown," says Richard.

"We're helping our facilities, particularly in the arts and culture, commercial and recreation spaces, to prepare for re-opening by providing them with the tools they need to manage contact tracing and physical distancing, and managing levels of service for cleaning and maintenance contractors so they are able to follow best practice models.

"We're also taking the opportunity to look at what we do day-to-day, how and why, so we can evolve and use what we've learned to improve the way we use and manage our facilities in the future."

**For more information, or to arrange an interview, please contact Sara Carbery, Communications Manager, 021 073 7934 | [editor@fmanz.org](mailto:editor@fmanz.org) | [www.fmanz.org](http://www.fmanz.org)**

### About FMANZ

FMANZ is the professional body for facilities management professionals in New Zealand. Our role is to support education, networking and knowledge sharing for members and to raise the profile of the FM industry in Aotearoa.

Facilities managers oversee the strategic and operational management of facilities to ensure public spaces and workplaces are safe, healthy, sustainable, productive and fit-for-purpose. As custodians of the built environment, they make a vital contribution to

the world and have an important role to play in many of the seismic shifts taking place in the world.

ENDS