

Guidance for the Evaluation of Method Statements for Entry into Plant Rooms

What is a Plant Room?

Plant rooms are spaces which are used to house electrical and mechanical services and systems. These can include; boiler rooms, electrical switch rooms, compressor houses, lift motor rooms, and service ducts or risers. These spaces cannot be accessed without a Permit to Access which is issued by the Estates Department.

Building Register

Coventry University maintains a register all areas within its estate including plant rooms. Information on each space is available from the Estates Department

Hazards in Plant Rooms

Contamination by Hazardous Materials or Substances – dependant on the type of plant there could be a risk of exposure to hazardous substances which may pose a risk to health. The space may also have contamination of asbestos in building materials or risers which if disturbed may be a risk to health.

Contact with moving machinery – some plant rooms, such as lift motor rooms can have moving parts which could cause injury from trapping and drawing in of body parts.

Presence of High Pressure Systems – plant rooms can house high pressure plant such as air receivers, steam pipes and hydraulic systems which could breach as a result of over pressurisation.

Hot and Cold Surfaces and Pipework – plant rooms can be heavily populated with pipework which can carry hot water, steam or cryogenic gasses. Such pipes and equipment can cause burns when contacted by exposed body parts.

Damaged Services and Electrical Systems – services in the building such as water pipes, electrical cables and heating systems may have been damaged from theft and vandalism. It is possible for such services to be live or dangerous.

Uneven and Irregular Floor Surfaces – as plant rooms are infrequently accessed by the staff the floor surfaces can be uneven or congested as a result of the storage of spares and equipment. This may result in trip hazards being present in the building which could be the cause of falls. The risk of falls is increased in low lighting situations.

Low headroom – some plant rooms may have pipes or ductwork that is below head height on access routes, this can lead to head injuries if a collision occurs whilst in the plant room. Some service ducts may be small enough that may require crawling to access plant and equipment.

High Noise Levels – Some plant located in rooms can generate noise levels as sufficient intensity to cause hearing damage, often plant will generate high noise levels spasmodically and without warning.

Precautions for access to Plant Rooms

As a **minimum** the following precaution should be applied to all access into Plant Rooms

1. The entry into the space must be subject to the University's Permit to Access System; no other local arrangements or contractors systems should be accepted. There permit must not be issued until a suitable and sufficient risk assessment and safe system of work has been supplied by the company or individuals undertaking the work.
2. The permit to access does not cover working and a separate permit must be applied for to undertake work in plant areas.
3. Those entering the space should be aware of any residual hazards that exist in the space; this information can be gained from the hazards register for each plant room.
4. Those entering the space should not touch or interfere with any plant in the area unless they have a permit to work and are considered to be competent in working on the specific plant.
5. The entry into the space should involve an effective communication system which enables lone working procedures to be followed.
6. Safe access and egress to the space should be identified in the safe system of work; this may need to provision of temporary escape routes. Clear and conspicuous safety signage must identify that entry into areas left open for access is prohibited.
7. Suitable lighting should be available during the task either from existing lighting in the area or supplementary lighting such as battery powered lighting. In either case emergency lighting should be available to aid escape in the event of a power failure.
8. Where necessary Isolation of mechanical and electrical equipment. Isolation requires the physical disconnection of the flow of power to the equipment in such a way that they cannot be accidentally reenergised. This will usually require isolation and locking off of the plant at the distribution board or at the local isolation switch. Any devices used to lock off equipment should only be removable by those working in and controlling the space.
9. The wearing of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as overalls, safety footwear, gloves, safety helmet and dust masks. Consideration should be given the specification of PPE where a contaminated atmosphere may exist. In high noise areas the wearing of suitable hearing protection must be considered as a mandatory item of PPE.

Further Guidance

Further Guidance on entry into plant rooms is available from the Estates Department, and the University's Safety and Risk Management Team.