

Guidance for Trade Unions as an essential service

The Government has confirmed that the CTU and affiliates are providing an essential service where they are representing their members who work in essential services.

Union officials have a fundamental statutory right to access work sites of their members. In these circumstances it is imperative that employers ensure its workers have access to union support and representation as COVID-19 can cause significant industrial hardship and difficulty.

Union Work

As with other essential services, Unions are striving to work from home so far as possible. Most Union work is largely manageable to be undertaken remotely and all efforts should be undertaken to do so. The NZCTU endorses affiliated Union policies that bar site visits unless absolutely necessary.

There may however still be a reason for a Union official to visit a worksite for its essential service workers. An essential worksite visit may be necessary to:

- Assist with a workplace death or significant injury
- Deal with serious health and safety breaches that can't be dealt with remotely
- Inspect unsafe workplace practices where conflicting information is being provided to the organiser
- Similarly significant reasons

Essential worksite visits

If a Union is considering a worksite visit during the Alert level 4 period, this should be considered on a case by case basis and should be signed-off by Union leadership as necessary.

Union officials visiting worksites should:

- Sign in at the site leaving full contact details
- Keep their own record of their visit including where they visited and whom they came into contact with, to assist with contact tracing for the Ministry of Health if required.
- Comply with all reasonable workplace procedures and requirements, including health and safety procedures that apply.
- Maintain physical distancing of 2m from members, delegates, and others.
- Meet with the fewest people possible to conduct their work.
- Not conduct face to face meetings.
- Only stay at the site for as long as required for the purpose of the visit.
- Maintain good hygiene including washing hands and using hand sanitiser. Visitors should match the hygiene standards of the site they are visiting.

Union officials should not visit worksites if they are feeling unwell or fall under the category of high risk to COVID-19, such as being immune compromised or over 70. Organisers who fit this category and consider a site visit is required might find alternative cover in their Union to advocate on their behalf while continuing to work remotely.

Union Access

Employers should not seek to obstruct or prevent union access, as access to Unions remains a fundamental statutory right.