



## **LOCKDOWN: NOW IS THE IDEAL TIME TO MAINTAIN AND REPAIR YOUR OFFICE SPACE**

It is often said that great opportunity often presents itself in the middle of great adversity. While much has already been said about how the current COVID-19 pandemic is disrupting our lives, the global economy and the business landscape, the facilities management experts at [Facilities Management Solutions](#) believe there are also certain valuable opportunities that have been created as a result of the current lockdown regulations that are in force in South Africa.

“In the same way it has allowed Mother Nature to take a deep breath and the natural environment around us to become healed and restored, this could also be seen as a time when the built environment around us is given an opportunity to rest, be repaired and restored,” says Lydia Hendricks, a Director at FM Solutions (FMS).

As a subsidiary company of the [AFMS Group](#), FMS delivers customised facilities management services to clients operating in various industries. Their focus is on enhancing the work environment through streamlining daily office services, delivering technical expertise and maintenance services to the built environment sector. According to Lydia, they are currently working with their clients to perform much-needed maintenance and repair jobs at office blocks and buildings while the workforce is still reduced.

“According to the regulations of the Disaster Management Act: Alert level 3 during Coronavirus COVID-19 lockdown, businesses and other institutions with more than 100 employees must minimise the number of employees at the workplace at any given time through introducing staff rotation, staggered working hours, shift systems, remote working arrangements or similar measures, in order to achieve social distancing and to limit congestion in public transport and at the workplace. This means that there are much fewer people on the premises than would normally be the case - giving us the ideal opportunity to do repairs and maintenance jobs without causing major disruptions to their day-to-day activities,” she explains.

Ensuring that the working environment is safe, healthy and well maintained has become a necessity in today's world. Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for workplaces to be thoroughly cleaned and sanitised, there are also a host of other hidden dangers in buildings and office spaces that need to be addressed. It is the responsibility of employers and managers to ensure they do not put the health and safety of their personnel or visitors at risk by failing to properly maintain their fixed assets. Some of these important maintenance tasks that companies should be performing at this time include:

### **Cleaning the heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system**

An HVAC system keeps the office environment comfortable and clean and has become the required industry standard for construction of new buildings. Like any other installation, however, it requires regular maintenance and care to ensure it delivers consistent performance and that the system will last a long time.

“An HVAC system ensures all stale air is recycled and helps maintain the indoor temperature. If you don't clean and maintain the system, its performance will start to slip and eventually the entire system will fail. This will force you to spend money on heating system replacement,” Lydia warns.



She recommends that HVAC systems should be visually inspected by a professional at least once every year to make sure all the systems are working well. As part of regular HVAC maintenance, dirty, dusty filters as well as blowers, moving parts, condensing units and other such important aspects of your HVAC system should be inspected and replaced to ensure that dust, debris and germs are removed. Make sure that there is no corrosive damage to the internal systems, check the thermostat settings and the condensate drain as excess moisture can cause problems like mould, water damage, high levels of humidity in the property, uneven temperature regulation, bacteria, and compromised air quality.

### **Inspect and repair or replace worn flooring**

“Each year, as many as 8 500 accidents in the workplace caused by ‘slips and trips’ are recorded in countries that typically have a population of 60 to 70 million people. This equates to approximately 37 % of all total accidents. Apart from costing the economy in excess of R12.5 billion per annum, a further R8.5 billion is lost annually by employers due to lost production. The importance of regularly inspecting floors for any sign of wear and tear and ensuring that damaged floors are replaced as soon as possible, cannot be overemphasised. For this reason, most countries (including South Africa) have now begun introducing legislation that requires that public floor areas be installed to comply with fixed safety regulations,” Lydia says.

Because floors in an office space are often subjected to heavy foot traffic and damage caused by chairs, desks and trolleys, it is important to select a floor that will be able to withstand this abuse, yet be easy to maintain and clean. Other considerations are installing static dissipative and static conductive flooring to eliminate static, unwanted shock transmissions and disruptive surges in sensitive areas where static electrical discharges might be hazardous to sensitive devices and electronics such as used in computer server rooms or laboratories.

“Replacing office floors can be very disruptive to staff members as the entire space needs to be cleared and could be out of use for several days. The smell of glues, solvents or cleaning chemicals might also irritate certain people and make it difficult for them to work. For this reason, it is prudent to consider using this time to invest in new floors or conduct a proper, deep-cleaning of office carpets,” she suggests.

### **Prepare for load shedding and reduce electricity consumption**

Eskom has warned that South Africans should prepare for the return of load shedding during the next few months when the demand for electricity increases. In an effort to minimise the disruption that these expected power cuts could have on businesses, FMS suggests taking certain pro-active steps.

“Small actions taken now could end up saving companies a lot of money and frustration in the long run,” Lydia says, adding that the cost of electricity is also expected to increase in due course. “Things like changing lightbulbs and upgrading to low-energy LED bulbs, implementing a remote meter reading or conducting electricity checks are important steps that should be taken now while disruption will be kept to a minimum. Likewise, be sure to check and repair your generator to ensure it is in working order when load shedding does return, or use this time to change over to solar energy,” she suggests.



### **Ensure you are COVID-19 ready**

In addition to the regular, yet important maintenance services that are required to ensure a safe and healthy working environment, it is vital for companies to use this time to ensure that they are COVID-19 ready and comply with regulations aimed at protecting workers from contracting the Coronavirus.

“Our handyman and FM services seamlessly integrate with our Occupational Health and Safety offering to deliver expert guidance in this regard. We help prepare the workplace by designing an ergonomic office set-up that also ensures adequate social distancing, sanitation stations, quarantine facilities and the use of necessary markings. In addition to this, we also take over the responsibility for disinfecting and regular deep-cleanings to protect the workers,” Lydia explains.

### **Conclusion**

There is a clear and distinct connection between safe, hygienic and orderly work environments and the overall happiness of employees. Operational efficiency, safety and hygiene and organised work environments have been found to have a bigger influence on job satisfaction than factors such as technology or machinery. For this reason, FM Solutions partner with their clients to ensure a well-maintained, productive office environment that is safe and comfortable to work in, but also ends up saving their clients time and money by avoiding down time and costly repairs.

For more information, visit [www.fm-solutions.co.za](http://www.fm-solutions.co.za) or email us on [info@fm-solutions.co.za](mailto:info@fm-solutions.co.za)