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Continued remote working is vital post lockdown to keep air pollution low, with 87% of workers wanting to continue to do so in some form

A new survey* by [The Business Clean Air Taskforce \(BCAT\)](#), which includes Philips and ENGIE, has uncovered that working remotely is both achievable and welcomed by the public. Off the back of the survey, charity Global Action Plan is urging the continuation of remote working as an option post lockdown to prevent a second spike of coronavirus, keep the streets free for key workers and air pollution down.

Almost 1 in 5 * commutes by car could be avoided if employees continue to work remotely as we emerge from lockdown. The survey, commissioned by charities Global Action Plan and Guy's and St. Thomas's Charity on behalf of the Business Clean Air Taskforce (BCAT), finds that:

- 87% of those currently working from home would like to continue to do so to some degree - which means that post-lockdown we could have 17 million regular remote workers versus just 10.8m pre-lockdown.
- Of the 19.5 million who have been working from home during lockdown, 41% were previously not allowed to do so.
- While remote working is not suitable for all professions and is not welcomed by everyone, allowing employees the option to work from home when it suits them can improve wellbeing, with 54% of lockdown homeworkers saying they are less stressed and 65% are happier not to deal with rush hour.

To avoid a surge in air pollution and the health issues it causes, Global Action Plan is encouraging businesses to embrace remote working fully for all employees it suits, as workplaces begin to open. This is the most immediate action companies can take to prevent employees from defaulting to driving to the office and clogging up the streets for those who must work on site.

Maintaining lower levels of air pollution could also help the recovery and prevention of a second spike in coronavirus, which have been linked.

The survey also finds that:

- 72% of the public believe clean air is more important now because coronavirus can affect people's lungs.
- 74% of the public want businesses to do more to improve air quality in their recovery.

Analysis of [Breath London Data](#) by Environmental Defense Fund Europe shows that air pollution significantly decreased after confinement measures went into place, with notable reductions during weekday commuting hours. Across Greater London, NO2 pollution decreased around 25% during the morning commute (8-11am) and 34% in the evening (5-8pm).

Chris Large, Partner at Global Action Plan, said: *"The experiences of working from home during lockdown have unlocked a new working option for millions of employees and it has kept many businesses running. If employers support greater remote working, as many as 1 in 5 car journeys driven for business purposes could be eliminated, equating to 11 billion*

miles saved per year. We should take this opportunity to minimise pollution and traffic, free employees from unnecessary travel and fortify business against future disruptions. We don't need to work from home every day to make a significant reduction to congestion on the roads which will help people breath cleaner air."

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, said: *"Here in London, we have already made great progress in improving air quality over recent years, and this has been accelerated further during the coronavirus lockdown. But cleaner air should not just be temporary. As the Government starts to ease lockdown measures, our challenge will be to eradicate air pollution permanently. Continued working from home, where possible, is now vital for allowing essential journeys on public transport to be made safely. But alongside our ambitious new plans to enable more walking and cycling, the longer-term effects of more remote working will mean even more improvements in air quality and help us tackle the ongoing climate emergency."*

Mark Leftwich, Managing Director for Philips UKI Consumer Business: *"One immediate consequence of COVID-19 is the growing understanding that the climate around us and our health are directly connected. Businesses have an important role to play in building and supporting sustainable behaviours that help all of us take better care of our immediate environment and our physical health. Agile working is not a new policy for Philips. However, like many other companies, when lockdown began, we rapidly moved the majority of our office-based teams to a home working environment, the speed and scale of which was completely new. As we are recovering from the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, we will continue to consult with our colleagues to develop new ways of working and policies to ensure we are being as flexible as possible in their workplace setting which is balanced against employees being able to fulfil their personal values of reducing their own environmental impact."*

Jamie Quinn, Director Responsible Business, ENGIE UK: *"ENGIE's UK workforce includes thousands of employees delivering key services across hospitals, schools and other essential sectors including critical energy infrastructure and transport networks. In addition, we have a large number of office-based staff. Health and safety are our utmost priorities, combined with our purpose of Making Zero Carbon Happen for our customers - which is closely linked with improving air quality. During the period of lockdown 4,500 employees have been working remotely, providing continuity of services and supporting front-line colleagues. Although it was new for many employees, our experience has been encouraging. We have learnt new ways of working and are providing our people with the right technology and training if required. We are following Government guidelines to adopt remote working where possible to eliminate risk whilst supporting the low carbon clear air agenda. We are also looking at ways of continuing to support colleagues to work more remotely after the period of lockdown."*

Stuart Sneddon, Air Quality Business Manager, Ricardo: *"During lockdown period, concentrations of NOx in many towns and cities across the UK have dropped significantly, due largely to the dramatic fall in road traffic on the roads. DfT estimates indicate that in some locations, car usage dropped to less than a quarter of pre-lockdown levels, with concentrations of NOx recorded at monitoring sites during this period showing up to an 80% reduction in NOx. As the UK gradually moves out of lockdown, our approach to travel and selected mode of transport will be an important factor as we try to bring about sustained improvements in air quality. However, not all air pollutant concentrations are directly related to transport, so we should not be complacent that tackling this sector alone is the complete solution. PM_{2.5} particles and ozone for example are well known respiratory irritants and the trends for these pollutants during lockdown certainly aren't as straight forward / positive as for NOx."*

Elizabeth Fonseca, Senior Air Quality Manager, Environmental Defense Fund Europe: *“Since the lockdown, air quality data from Breathe London shows that NO2 pollution has gone down significantly during commute times. We saw pollution decrease across the city, including in residential areas, indicating there have been benefits to Londoners' health even away from busy roads. Insights from air quality data, as well as greater understanding of pollution sources, can help us learn from the current situation and inform policymakers to better protect people's health.”*

*Survey results of 2,000 respondents:

- 87% of those currently working from home would like to continue to do so, with 29% wishing to work from home every day.
- 72% of the public believe clean air is more important now because coronavirus can affect people's lungs.
- 74% want businesses to “do more to cut pollution and traffic after the lock down so that neighbourhoods don't go back to the way they were”.
- Of those now working from home:
 - 54% said they are currently less stressed.
 - 65% are happier not to deal with rush hour.
 - 59% have more time with friends and family.

But also:

- 41% were previously not allowed to do so.
- 41% do not have all the equipment they need.
- Social isolation – 50% of those who are homeworking in the lockdown feel more isolated working from home.
- Healthy, productive home working habits – 44% “struggle to switch off” at the end of a home-work day and 56% say they face more distractions working at home (perhaps elevated by children at home due to school closures).

***Of those who worked from home during the lockdown:**

- A. 55% of employees who worked remotely during lockdown and already had experience of remote working adopting one day per week of additional remote working compared to pre-lockdown.
- B. 32% of employees who worked remotely during lockdown and never worked remotely before adopting two or three days per week of continued remote working post lockdown. We have assumed two days if they were able to work at home partially during lockdown and three days if they were able to fully work at home during lockdown.

Plus:

- C. 13% of employees who worked remotely during lockdown but don't want to continue after lockdown adopting zero remote working **have not been** included in this calculation. There is however potential here for more remote working as reasons for not wanting to work remotely include lack of equipment and temporary disruption of children off school, but more support could enable some remote working for this group.
- D. A further 15.7 million employees didn't work from home at all during lockdown: The scenario assumes zero adoption of remote working by this group (further exploration may find opportunities to adopt more working from walkable remote working hubs or the home, or perhaps they were just furloughed but already in jobs that readily suit remote working).