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Is it Safe to do a Blower Door Test during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

If you own our equipment, you are likely facing this question.

This is a question that can only be answered by you and your company. Like many businesses, you will have to determine your own policy, develop specific procedures, and it should be done in close coordination with health professional authorities in your area. These will include items that are not unique to individuals running a blower door test – like having proper PPE, following strict screening steps of both testers and occupants, and being diligent about following CDC and local health guidelines around distancing, wearing masks, and disinfecting.

There is a small part of developing these procedures and policy which may require some background information related to what happens in a building during a blower door test. This document is intended to provide background information to the healthcare professionals who may not understand what a blower door is and how it moves air in building.

What does a Blower Door do?

In testing a building's air tightness, a blower door causes air to pass through the leaks that occur in a building, sometimes in directions that they do not normally flow. In any pressurization or depressurization test, outdoor air is flowing into the building (or the space being tested, if it's not the whole building) and indoor air is flowing out of the building (or the space being tested).

During a pressurization test, the airflow in is through the blower door fan, and an equal airflow is through all the leaks in the building. The opposite is true in a de-pressurization test (airflow in is through all the leaks and out is through the blow door fan). This could cause the flow of air between spaces that do not normally have air flow – and cause air to be pushed between individuals. This should be considered when deciding policy and setting procedures – and should consider risk to both the person running the test as well as building occupants.

Knowing that a blower door test will cause airflow out of the space being tested, the following is a list of questions you should consider:

1. Is the building occupied?
 - a. Consider both occupants or other workers who may be on-site.
 - b. If unoccupied, the air flow of the blower door test may not be a significant consideration to setting policy or procedure.

2. Is it a single-family dwelling or does it share walls with adjacent dwellings?
 - a. If it has shared walls, the moving of air from one building envelope to another may be a concern.

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Are there Best Practices to Run a Blower Door Test during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Like many businesses, you will have to determine your own policy, develop specific procedures, and it should be done in close coordination with health professionals and authority in your area. These will include items that are not unique to individuals running a blower door test – like having proper PPE, following strict screening steps of both testers and occupants, and being diligent about following CDC and local health guidelines around distancing, wearing masks, and disinfecting.

The following suggestions are intended to give you a few specific items to consider adding to your overall policy and procedures as it relates to running a blower door test. These are line item suggestions to consider in your overall policy specific to running a blower door test. **It is not intended to outline a full process or procedure.**

1. Run your test from outside the building, (but still ensure house is properly set-up for the test)
 - a. Once the building is properly set-up for the test, in general, it is probably better to be outside the home than inside to allow for separation of occupants and the person performing the test.
 - b. This is consistent with maximizing social distancing
 - c. You can be outside the building whether running a pressurization or depressurization test
2. During the test, move away from the fan
 - a. To minimize potential exposure between occupants and the person performing the test, move away from the fan during the test.
 - b. To support this – consider using wireless control / mobile devices to execute the test process from a distance.
3. Equipment surfaces should be cleaned per CDC disinfecting guidelines prior to being packed up.
 - a. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>