

Advisory Note

A Service to A.G. Coombs Group Clients.

NABERS & COVID-19

NABERS have released a document outlining information for assessors and building owners on how NABERS ratings will be affected by COVID-19, with the latest version published on 10th June 2020. We have developed this information into a readily accessible FAQ format to assist building owners, facility managers and NABERS Assessors.

NABERS & COVID-19 FAQs – Building Owners & Facility Managers

What guidance has NABERS provided on the impact of COVID-19 on NABERS ratings?

NABERS have released a document¹ that provides information to assessors and building owners on how NABERS ratings will be affected by COVID-19, entitled “Managing impacts of COVID-19 on NABERS ratings” (v3.0, issued 10th June 2020).

The latest version includes several updates that supersede information provided in the previous version (issued on 5th May 2020).

The document answers FAQs provides clarifications and includes five time-bound temporary Rulings.

¹<https://www.nabers.gov.au/about/covid-19-and-nabers-ratings>

What are the key changes in the latest Version 3.0 Rulings from previous versions?

1. The validity of the NABERS COVID-19 rules has been extended from 30th June 2020 to 31st July 2020.
2. The previously imposed moratorium on the use of consumption data between 23rd March 2020 to 30th June 2020 has been lifted. This means that current and future ratings can use consumption data which aligns with previous rating periods, to facilitate more effective comparison of building performance.
3. The rating submission periods for all ratings have reverted to 120 days, which had been extended to 180 days in the previous version of NABERS COVID-19 rules.
4. Additional details to treat low occupancy during the COVID-19 affected periods have been included in the latest version.

Why have NABERS published temporary COVID-19 Rulings?

A The main objective of publishing the NABERS COVID-19 rulings is to provide guidelines for assessors on conducting ratings during the COVID-19 affected period, which is defined from 1st March 2020 to 31st July 2020.

However, the rulings also provide useful information for building owners (e.g. core hours treatment, vacancy details, etc.) to operate their properties to achieve optimum NABERS performances.

My building has zero or near-zero occupancy due to tenants working from home. Should I shut down base building services to temporarily vacated floors where a lease agreement is still in place?

All buildings should be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Services to vacated floors should typically be turned off when they aren't required to operate, and where the base building plant is configured to enable this.

Building owners should consider how building services are shut down, so that essential services and life safety equipment can operate if required.

Where building owners do not wish to shut down plants, there are many opportunities to tune the building services to reduce energy use during periods of very low occupancy.

Note: Shutting down services must be done in consideration of ongoing maintenance regimes that may require continued or intermittent system operation to be effective, such as pipework chemical treatment.

Additional documents such as addendums to existing leases, formal written evidence, emails, statements made by building owners etc. will be requested by assessors to verify the alteration of building services for affected areas during the next rating time.

If I turn off base building services to temporarily vacated floors, will this impact the building's NABERS energy rating?

NABERS encourages building owners and operators to run buildings in the most energy efficient way possible, as long as it is safe to do so. Buildings recording low occupancies due to tenants are working from home during the affected period more likely to receive positive impacts on their current and future ratings.

We recommend seeking professional advice from NABERS assessors or consultants on the potential impacts on NABERS ratings as a result of switching off building services.

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What should I do if tenants request lease conditions to be maintained on their vacated floors during the lockdown period?

Building managers should apply the optimum operational strategy for their buildings while meeting specific tenant requirements.

Additionally, due to the significantly reduced internal loads on temporarily vacated floors, the base building system control parameters (particularly for HVAC systems) should be recalibrated and tuned accordingly, to maximise energy efficiency during this period.

It is recommended to retain operational evidence of such as specific tenant requests to alter building services etc. to validate core hours during current and future ratings.

My building does not require a new NABERS rating to be undertaken between now and 31st July 2020. What do I need to do?

At this stage, no action is required and your NABERS assessor will advise further details of any likely impacts on your rating at the time of conducting the rating. However, it is vital to maintain an optimum building services management strategy such as adjustment to BMS

schedules, switching to 'on request' services etc. during the COVID-19 affected period, as poorly managed buildings may result in negative impacts on their future NABERS ratings.

How does the COVID-19 impact affect my Indoor Environment Rating?

The following options may be considered:

1. Seek an extension on the current rating until 31st July 2020; or
2. Engage your NABERS assessor to renew the current rating by utilising the new V3.0 Rulings, which include a range of alternative solutions to successfully complete the rating.

Note: If the site is not accessible by the assessor to carry out spot measurements between 1st March 2020 and 31st July 2020, an Indoor Environment rating cannot be conducted until site access becomes available.

If your situation is different and you need further guidance, we recommend you contact NABERS directly on:

nabers@environment.nsw.gov.au.

NABERS & COVID-19 FAQs – NABERS Assessors

When do the COVID-19 temporary rulings apply?

The COVID-19 rules may apply for any NABERS Ratings with a current rating period ending between 1st Mar 2020 and 31st Jul 2020.

NABERS have been continuously monitoring the developments due to the impact of COVID-19 on NABERS ratings and the applicability period may be extended after 31st July 2020.

I don't have a NABERS rating to perform between now and 31st July 2020, how will my future assessments be affected?

Any future ratings commencing after 31st July 2020 are likely to be undertaken using standard NABERS rules, unless NABERS extend the COVID-19 rules beyond 31st July 2020.

Low occupancies and lower consumption data recorded over the affected period mean that many buildings may receive a temporary boost in their ratings.

We recommend you continue to review published updates on the impacts of COVID-19 on new ratings and liaise directly with the NABERS National Administrator for further information.

I have a NABERS rating to commence between now and 31st July 2020, what do I need to do?

The COVID-19 temporary Rulings may apply – we can assess individual circumstances and provide customised advice to suit relevant buildings.

We recommend you review the version 3.0 document from NABERS and liaise directly with NABERS for further details.

How do I treat unoccupied spaces during the affected period?

1. If a valid lease (OTA) was in place and the tenant was working from home due to the lockdown restrictions, the whole space should be considered as 'occupied'. This applies regardless of services arrangement or status of OTA complaint requests made by tenants during the affected period
2. If a valid lease contract had not been executed, and the area was a typical vacant space, treat the space as 'unoccupied'

I have different site-specific conditions affecting my rating during the lockdown period, what should I do?

Should you wish to make an internal query first, please contact us or directly liaise with the NABERS National Administrator for a customised solution to address your situation.

A.G. Coombs Advisory can assist building owners and facility managers by providing bespoke guidance on strategies to manage the building services for each of their buildings during the COVID-19 shutdown period.

For further information and advice on NABERS ratings in relation to COVID-19 please contact:

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The above information is general advice and may be subject to interpretation by individual NABERS accredited professionals for each particular situation.

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