

'COVID-killing' remote working pods to revive town centers

March 2 2021, by Hayley Jarvis



Credit: Space Republic

Ghost town high streets could come back to life using empty shops to house sealed, self-contained, self-cleaning remote working pods that use ultraviolet light to kill coronavirus. Home workers could escape cramped kitchen tables for super-sanitized workspaces where they can focus on

Zoom calls or important work while boosting local trade.

Virus experts and materials specialists at Brunel University London are testing how well chemical-free ultraviolet decontamination kills off COVID-19. "UV light is used to sterilize hospital operating theaters," said Dr. Mike Themis. "And we are using this natural component of light inside the [pods](#) to kill the [virus](#) at its core by destroying its DNA, so the next person walking into the pod can't catch it."

The team will put an infectious version of the live COVID-19 virus onto a pod's inside surfaces, plastics and fabrics to test how well the UV kills the virus and how the materials stand up to the wear and tear from decontamination.

"We have highly sensitive ways to detect the virus so we know once we have destroyed it in the pod" the virologist said. "The pods have two different ways of killing the virus and we are detecting how well they kill the virus after decontamination.

The sealed work stations, called [Pluto work pods](#), would be put inside defunct high street chains, pubs, hotels and shopping centers that people living locally can walk or cycle to get to. People could hire a pod for a two-hour concentration session in a safe environment where they can plug in for focus-friendly solo working.



Credit: Space Republic

"There's so much empty retail space now," said Luke Aviet at Space Republic, which will make the pods.

"Failing high street chains have left a network of empty shops, so while socially distanced office space is lacking and enhanced cleaning expensive, it makes sense to use these spaces to help local economies back on their feet. The comfortable, well-lit distraction-free workspace can help productivity and mental health."

The £247,605 six-month project to test and perfect the pods is backed by the government's Innovate UK's £134M COVID-19 innovation recovery fund.

"With world-class research facilities and sector leading expertise, Brunel is perfectly positioned to test and validate the technology we have developed to combat COVID-19," said Aviet.

Brunel's Prof Karnik Tarverdi added: "This innovation focuses on the application of existing chemical-free technologies aimed to destroy pathogens within the pod with a focus on COVID-19."

Provided by Brunel University

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