



Working at Height

INTRODUCTION

The Health and Safety Executive have published their figures for workplace fatalities in Great Britain, and the most common cause of fatal injury is falling from height. This has been the case for several years. It affects most industry sectors but is a particular issue in certain sectors such as the construction industry. It can occur in any premises for example during maintenance, window cleaning, loading/unloading vehicles, adventure activities and roof work.

Accidents can involve falling from ladders, stepladders or other work equipment and open edges (e.g. from mezzanines, scaffolds and mobile access towers). Frequently, falls occur during roof work from open edges, through roof lights or other fragile roofing materials.

Many falls are usually attributable to poor management control rather than being specifically related to the failure of work equipment. In many circumstances, a combination of factors contribute to the accident including inadequate risk assessment, issues with the safe system of working including the provision and use of suitable equipment, and inadequate information, instruction, training and supervision for those involved in the work.

WHAT SHOULD ORGANISATIONS BE DOING?

While the general requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations may apply, the principal duties relating to the prevention of falls are detailed in the Work at Height Regulations. Other additional requirements might also apply in some circumstances (e.g. where work equipment - such as a cherry picker - is used, the Provision and Use of Work Equipment regulations would also apply amongst others). In some industrial settings, the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations will also be relevant.

THE WORK AT HEIGHT REGULATIONS

These regulations set minimum safety standards to prevent falls. They cover nearly all work premises. 'Work at height' means any place at (or below ground) from which a person could fall a distance liable to cause personal injury and the duties extend to cover access to and from such a place (except by a staircase in a permanent workplace). They do not cover travel to and from a place of work.

The Regulations:

- Impose duties relating to the organising and planning of such work
- Require that persons are competent (or supervised by competent persons)
- Specify steps to be taken to avoid risk from work at height
- Impose duties relating to the selection/specification of work equipment
- Require the avoidance of risks from fragile surfaces, falling objects and danger areas
- Require the inspection of certain work equipment and of places of work at height.

IF YOU ARE THE EMPLOYER

If an organisation has employees, they must comply with their duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act (Section 2 - General duties to employees and Section 3 - General duties to others who are not employees) and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (in particular, Regulation 3 - Risk assessment).

They also need to comply with the Work at Height Regulations, along with any other specific requirements of the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations.

This is in addition to any civil law duty of care owed.

On this basis, best practice considerations include the following:

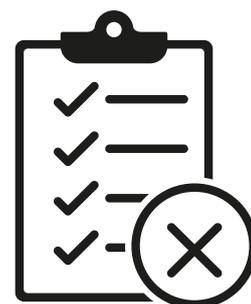
- Ensuring that work is properly planned in advance, including any emergency procedures and the selection of appropriate work equipment, appropriately supervised, and carried out in a safe manner
- Ensuring that any risk assessments completed identify circumstances where work at height is involved and determine what, if anything, needs to be done to comply with applicable statutory requirements. In particular, risk assessments should clearly demonstrate that where ladders are to be used their use is justified because of the low risk, and the short duration of use, or existing features on site which cannot be altered. In most circumstances, assessments should be recorded, reviewed and updated as necessary

- In identifying the necessary precautions. First avoiding the need for work at height by, for example, completing it from ground level. Where this is not possible, determining the work equipment and/or other precautions required to prevent falls. If possible, existing places of work should be used first where these are suitable i.e. they are stable, of sufficient strength and rigidity, provide safe access. Where this is not possible, suitable equipment should be used to prevent or minimise the distance and consequences of a fall. Collective protection measures such as edge protection, scaffolds and nets should be given priority over personal protection i.e. harnesses, taking account of the specific working conditions, access/egress travel distances, potential fall distances/consequences, duration and frequency of use, emergency evacuation and rescue requirements and loadings.
- Implementing and maintaining the precautions identified as being necessary.

The Work at Height Regulations set specific standards that need to be met for working platforms (see Schedule 3); guard-rails, toe-boards, barriers or similar collective means of protection (see Schedule 2); nets, airbags or other collective safeguards (see Schedule 4); personal fall protection systems, work positioning systems, rope access and positioning techniques, fall arrest systems and work restraint systems (see Schedule 5); and ladders (see Schedule 6).

Other precautions will include:

- Those required to prevent materials or objects likely to cause injury from falling, ensuring that they are suitably stored and will not be thrown or tipped from height; those to identify work areas and prevent unauthorised access to them where necessary; and those relating to safe access; the use of lifting equipment; the provision of adequate lighting; safety around overhead service and/or equipment and the use of personal protective equipment.
- Avoiding the need for work on or near fragile surfaces - including roof lights. Where this is not possible identifying and implementing adequate precautions to prevent falls (e.g. by providing suitable platforms, coverings, guard rails, roof ladders, crawling boards and warning signs)
- Ensuring that no work at height is carried out during adverse weather conditions
- Ensuring that work (including any organisation, planning and supervision) is only carried out by persons who are competent or, if being trained, are supervised by someone who is. The level and detail of competence required should be identified by a risk assessment.
- Recording and keeping details of any training and information provided to employees. Training records should contain such detail relating to the persons who were trained; when they were trained and by whom; an overview of the training that was provided; details relating to any certification provided or other test to verify understanding, along with trainees signing to state that they have received and understood it.
- Ensuring that the workforce is appropriately consulted on the required precautions.
- Recording the arrangements and responsibilities for managing work at height as part of the health and safety policy (or supporting documentation) where one is needed to comply with health and safety law and reviewing these where necessary. This should include arrangements to ensure that the specified inspections (as detailed in the Work at Height Regulations) are carried out by a competent person; the control of contractors involved in such work and the steps to be taken where it is not possible to follow the required system of working.





IF YOU ARE NOT THE EMPLOYER

If an organisation has control of any work at height completed by others, they will need to comply with the Work at Height Regulations - but only to the extent of their control.

Similarly, if they control work equipment; a person at work who uses, supervises, or manages the use of work equipment; or the way in which work equipment is used at work must comply with the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations. Again, they only need to comply with the requirements to the extent of their control. 'Work equipment' means any machinery, appliance, apparatus, tool or installation for use at work (whether exclusively or not) and would include access equipment.

In addition to these specific requirements, organisations that do not have employees will still need to meet duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. This is where they control non-domestic premises made available to others as 'a place of work' or where they may use 'plant or substances provided for their use there' (Section 4). In these circumstances and for work at height, they must make sure that the premises and plant (e.g. any access equipment) provided for use by others are safe.

A similar civil duty to that of employers is also owed.

FURTHER TOPIC RESOURCES

Further information is available as follows:

- The Work at Height Regulations, SI 2005/No. 735, available at www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/735/made
- General information is available at www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/index.htm
- Working at Height, A brief guide, INDG 401, HSE, available at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg401.pdf
- Safe use of ladders and stepladders, A brief guide, INDG 455, HSE, available at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg455.htm