

Part 2 – Work at Height

Key Points to Consider and General Precautions

Key Points to Consider

- Those following good practice for work at height now will normally be doing enough to comply with the Regulations; follow the risk assessment you have carried out for work at height activities and make sure all work at height is planned, organised and carried out by competent people.
- Follow the hierarchy for managing risks from work at height – take steps to avoid, prevent or reduce risks
- Choose the right work equipment and select collective measures to prevent falls (such as guardrails and working platforms) before other measures which may only mitigate the distance and consequences of a fall (such as nets or airbags) or may only provide personal protection from a fall.
- Don't start work at height until you have properly planned how you are going to do it, and you have assessed and controlled the risks involved.
- Ensure that you have fully considered all of the ways in which you or your staff could be at risk of falling.
- Check there is a safe method of getting to and from the work area. Decide what particular equipment will be suitable for the job and the conditions on site.
- Don't underestimate the risks involved. Simply 'taking care' is not enough. Proper precautions must be in place.
- Consider whether there are other, safer ways of doing the job.
- Decide what equipment is required for the job. Precautions should be designed to prevent a fall, for example using guardrails at a roof edge or crawling boards on a fragile roof. For some jobs it may be appropriate to use fall arrest equipment such as a safety harness.
- Make sure that the equipment needed is delivered to site in good time and that the site has been prepared for it.
- Ensure that work platforms and any edges from which people are likely to fall have guardrails, toe boards or other barriers.

- If you have not got the appropriate equipment then get it. Don't take a chance with a ladder if what you should be using is a tower scaffold. Making do without the right equipment to minimise expense can lead to injury or death, as well as prosecution if the law is broken.
- Ensure that any equipment you use is in good condition with no defects.
- Make sure that whoever puts the equipment together is trained and knows what they are doing.
- Make sure that equipment is used safely and that any necessary training and/or supervision is provided. The more specialised the equipment (e.g. mobile elevating work platforms (MEWPs), boatswain's chairs and rope access equipment etc), the greater the degree of training and supervision required to ensure safety.
- Check any equipment provided by another company to make sure it is safe before using it on site.
- Find out who to tell if any defects need to be remedied or modifications need to be made and keep them informed.
- Only when other methods are not reasonably practicable or when work platforms cannot comply with all the requirements for safe work should a way of arresting falls be used. The chosen method must provide collective protection to all those working there e.g. nets or air bags. If there are no other means available of providing a safe place of work at height then an appropriately anchored harness (personal fall arrest) should be worn. Whenever fall arrest harnesses are used, a rescue method must be available should the user fall and be left suspended in their harness.
- When selecting a safe system for work at height, all the risks have to be considered before one method is selected.
- Before installing or using any system of work to enable safe work at height to be carried out, check that there is adequate clearance for equipment e.g. overhead power lines can be a risk when erecting scaffolds or using MEWPs.

General Precautions

Falls from ladders

- Properly assess the job to determine what equipment should be used. Ladders are often used for tasks, which could be done more safely and more quickly from equipment such as a cherry picker or a scaffold. Only use ladders for low risk, short duration tasks or where the existing features of the site cannot be altered.
- Ladders should primarily be used for access and only be used at workplaces to do light work of short duration, and then only if it is safe to do so.
- Heavy work activity and carrying heavy loads should never be carried out from a ladder
- If a ladder is to be used make sure that it is secure and cannot slip. Tie it at the top, have someone hold it at the base, or use a suitable stability device to prevent it from slipping. If the ladder is more than 5m long, a person at the base is unlikely to be able to stop it from slipping.
- Place the ladder on a firm, stable surface which is of suitable strength to keep the rungs horizontal.
- Consider using attachments such as an adjustable ladder leveller, or a 'stand' spreader bar.
- Set the ladder at the correct angle. It should be angled out one measure for every four up (75 degrees).
- Use a ladder that is, or can be, extended to the correct length – don't work from the top 3 rungs of the ladder. Make sure the ladder protrudes sufficiently above the place of landing to which it provides access – 3 rungs or 1m should be enough.
- When using a ladder ensure that the person on the ladder always has three points of contact i.e. two legs and a hand.
- Check the ladder for defects, and make sure that it is only used by people who know how to use it correctly.

Falls from open edges

- Consider whether there are ways of doing the job which avoid working at height. For example it may be possible to carry out cleaning work from the ground or from a catwalk using long-handled cleaning tools.
- If work at height is unavoidable, aim to protect against falls by providing a suitable working platform fitted with edge protection (i.e. guard rails and toe boards).
- In some, exceptional, circumstances it may be appropriate to use fall-arrest equipment such as a safety harness. If such equipment is used, adequate training and supervision must be provided.
- Always consider how else the job could be undertaken before deciding to work from a ladder. It will often be safer, easier and quicker to use a tower scaffold, mobile elevating work platform or suitably adapted forklift truck.

Falls through fragile roofs

- Assume that roofs are fragile unless you can confirm otherwise – there may be non-visible damage caused by weathering, deterioration, etc.
- Always avoid working on a roof if it is possible to carry out the work in another way, e.g. approaching the roof from below.
- Never go onto any part of a fragile roof without platforms to support your weight.
- Fit appropriate warning signs to buildings which have fragile roofs, particularly at roof access points.
- Never walk along the line of purlin bolts – it is like walking a tightrope
- Ensure that platforms are wide enough and long enough to give adequate support across roof members and ensure that enough platforms are provided on the roof.
- Protect against falling through the fragile roof adjacent to the platform by providing:
 - a properly installed safety net, scaffolding or similar close to the underside of the roof; or
 - suitable guard rails and toeboards at the edges of the platform;
or

- further suitable coverings over all fragile materials within 2m of the working platform.

Falls through roof lights

- Check carefully for any roof lights in non-fragile roofs, as they can be difficult to spot. They may have been painted over. In bright sunshine they can blend in with the surrounding sheets.
- Take precautions to prevent falls wherever the job involves passing by or working within 2m of fragile roof light. For example:
 - fit suitable, secure covers over the roof light; or
 - provide suitable guard rails and toe boards around the roof light; or
 - provide a safety net, airbag or similar immediately below the roof light.

Falls from machinery

- Use other work equipment if possible (e.g. a tower scaffold or cherry picker) – only use working platforms for short duration tasks in exceptional circumstances.
- Only fit working platforms to suitable machines.
- Consult the manufacturers / suppliers information to ensure that the truck and working platform are compatible.
- Only use working platforms on machines which have a tilt / trip 'lock' to prevent accidental tilting of the platform.
- Only use properly constructed working platforms fitted with full edge protection.
- Ensure that any gates in the edge protection open inwards, upwards or sideways, and return automatically to the closed position.
- Never work from ordinary pallets, buckets or forks.
- Ensure that working platforms are properly fitted to trucks.
- Fit suitable screens / guards to platforms to prevent access to any dangerous parts of the mast or boom.

- Always ensure someone remains at the controls of the truck while the platform is in a raised position.
- Make sure that trucks / platforms have been thoroughly examined by a competent person within the last six months (under LOLER).
- Make sure the maximum number of people to be carried, and the safe working load, are displayed on the platform.