**Why Consider the Risks of Falls from Height?**

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# Why Consider the Risks of Falls from Height?

Falls from height are responsible for many serious and fatal injuries every year. If a person falls from a height above two metres the likelihood is that they will sustain serious injury.

Many work activities involve working at height. Working from ladders, scaffolds and platforms are obvious examples, but there are many more activities where people are required to work at height.

Examples include roof work, working over tanks and pits, at the edge of elevated structures, or on top of vehicles or trailers.

## The Risks of Working at Height

The main hazards associated with working at height are people falling and objects falling onto people below.

## Legal Duties and Obligations around Working at Height

As well as the moral duty of employers to protect employees and members of the public, General Health and Safety Legislation covers all employers and workplaces.

In addition, there are some general requirements contained in other regulations relating to working at height:

The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 These regulations cover all aspects of the workplace. They include the requirement that employers ensure that all areas where people could fall from a height are properly guarded or covered.

The Work at Height Regulations 2005 The main aim of these regulations is to encourage the avoidance of working at height if possible and where it cannot be avoided to use the best practicable means of ensuring the safety of those working at height.

## Assessing Risks from Working at Height

If work at height cannot be avoided, a risk assessment should be carried out before any work at height is undertaken. The assessment should highlight the measures that must be taken to ensure people are not at risk of falling from height.

The risks associated with working at height must be assessed. The Health and Safety Executive recommends a five-step approach to risk assessment, and the risk of slips, trips and falls should also be considered.

**Step 1** Look for hazards associated with falls from height around the workplace. Where are people required to work at height? Do they carry out work from ladders, platforms, or scaffolds?

**Step 2** Decide who might be harmed and how. Who comes into the workplace? Are they at risk? Are some groups more at risk than others?

**Step 3** Consider the risks. Are there already measures in place to deal with the risks? Look at areas with unguarded openings or without guardrails and covers. Are regular inspections carried out?

**Step 4** Record your findings if you have five or more employees.

**Step 5** Regularly review the assessment. If any significant changes take place, make sure that precautions are still adequate to deal with the risks.

## Good Practice:

### Ladders

Ladders are acceptable only for access or work of short duration.

They should be:

* erected at correct angle (4 up to 1 out)
* secured (preferably at top) or footed
* positioned close to the work to avoid over-reaching
* sufficiently protected at the base of any ladder or access equipment to prevent pedestrians or vehicles bumping into them.

### Stepladders

When using stepladders, the following precautions should be taken:

* always spread them to their full extent and lock them off
* do not work on the top platform
* do not use the top tread, tool shelf or rear part of the steps as a foot support
* only one person should be on the ladder at any one time
* the ladder must be appropriate and of the correct grade for the intended use.

### Access Equipment

* any hired equipment must be fit for the purpose. Hire contractors must provide information about the risks involved.
* all access equipment must be properly maintained and regularly inspected
* those erecting and using access equipment must be competent to do so, and training should be provided where necessary
* precautions must be taken to prevent the fall of objects or persons
* do not increase reach by placing ladders on access equipment.

### Mobile Elevated Platforms

* use the platform only on level, firm ground
* only use the equipment with outriggers and stabilisers
* work with a trained operator at ground level
* safety harnesses must be worn while on the platform
* keep the platform within safe working limits and radius, taking account of wind speeds.

### Scaffold Towers

Scaffold Towers should:

* be erected by a competent person
* have a height to base dimension ratio not exceeding 3 to 1 indoors, or 2.5 to 1 outdoors
* have stabilisers deployed as necessary to meet the correct height to base ratio
* use outriggers or stabilisers if above 2.5 m high
* have all casters firmly locked before use
* have ladder access to the working platform
* never be moved while the tower is occupied
* be regularly inspected and maintained.

### Safety Lines, Harnesses and Nets

Fall restraint and arrest equipment such as nets, airbags and harnesses, etc. should only be considered as a last resort when no other means are reasonably practicable.

They should only be used and erected by trained operatives and tested and inspected regularly.