

Working at heights

Background

According to HSE statistics in 2010/11 35% of all reported injuries to employees were due to slips, trips or falls from height. Reported injuries to employees due to falls from height (excluding stairs/cellar stairs) accounted for 6,344 injuries. An additional 469 injuries were reported by the self-employed.

Legislation

The Work at Height Regulations 2005 as amended by the Work at Height (Amendment) Regulations 2007 apply to all work at height where there is a risk of a fall liable to cause personal injury. They cover detailed requirements for:

Schedule 1: Existing places of work and means of access for work at height

Schedule 2: Collective fall prevention (eg. guard rails and toe boards)

Schedule 3: Working platforms

Schedule 4: Collective fall arrest (eg. nets, airbags etc)

Schedule 5: Personal fall protection (eg. work restraints, work positioning, fall arrest and rope access)

Schedule 6: Ladders and stepladders

Schedule 7: Inspection reports (for working platforms in construction only)

Schedule 8: Revocations

They place duties on employers, the self-employed and any person who controls the work of others such as facilities managers or property owners who may contract others to work at height.

Your responsibilities as an employer/dutyholder

As a dutyholder you must do all that is reasonably practicable to prevent anyone falling, by avoiding working at height whenever possible and where this cannot be avoided taking the necessary precautions to minimise the risk involved.

The following summarises your responsibilities as a dutyholder:

Planning

- The dutyholder must ensure that all work at height is properly planned and organised.
- No work at height should be conducted if it is safe and reasonable practicable to do it by other means.
- All work should be appropriately planned, appropriately supervised and carried out in as safe a way as is reasonably practicable.
- Emergencies and rescue contingencies should be planned for.
- All work should take account of the risk assessment which is required under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations.

Weather conditions

- All work at height must take account of weather conditions that could endanger health and safety. Work must be postponed while weather conditions endanger health and safety.

Training

- Dutyholders must make sure all those involved in work at height are trained and competent. This involves involvement in the organisation, planning, supervision, and the supply and maintenance of equipment.
- Trainees must be supervised by a competent person.
- Where the risk of a fall occurring cannot be eliminated entirely, you must, as far as is reasonably practicable, train those who will be working at height how to avoid falls and how to minimise injury in the case of a fall.

Place of work

- Dutyholders must ensure that the place where work at height is done is safe and as far as is reasonably practicable given the demands of the task, equipment and working environment has features installed to prevent a fall.
- If the risk of a fall cannot be entirely eliminated then you must do all that is reasonably practicable to minimise the distance and effect of a fall.
- Detailed safety requirements are detailed in schedule 1 of the legislation.

Equipment

- Equipment must be provided for preventing (as far as is reasonably practicable) a fall occurring – for exceptions see regulation 6(4).
- Where any precautions taken do not entirely eliminate the risk of a fall occurring then you must do all that is reasonably practicable to minimise the distance and effect of a fall.
- When selecting equipment for working at height you must: Use the most suitable equipment.
- Give collective protection measures priority over personal protection measures.
- Take account of the working conditions and risks to the safety of all those at the place where the equipment is to be used.
- All equipment, temporary structures (eg. scaffolding) and safety features must comply with the requirements set out in schedules 2 to 6 of the regulations.

Inspections

- Dutyholders must ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable to do so, that each and every place at which work is to be done from height is checked on every occasion before that place is used. This involves checking the surface and every parapet, permanent rail etc.
- All equipment used for work at height must be appropriately inspected by a competent person and the appropriate records kept.
- For more detailed information please refer to regulations 12 and 13 of the legislation.

Fragile surfaces

- The dutyholder must ensure that risks from fragile surfaces are properly controlled. No one working under your control should go onto or near a fragile surface unless, taking into consideration the task, equipment or working environment, it is the only reasonably practicable way for the worker to carry out the work safely.
- If anyone does need to work on or near a fragile surface you must minimise the risk by ensuring, as far as is reasonably practicable, that suitable platforms, guard rails, coverings etc. are provided.
- If the risk of a fall cannot be eliminated you must do all that is reasonably practicable to minimise the distance and effect of the fall.
- You must make anyone working on fragile surfaces aware of the danger, preferably by the use of warning notices fixed at the entrance to the dangerous area.

Falling objects

- The risks from falling objects must be properly controlled. Dutyholders must, where it is necessary to prevent injury, do all that is reasonably practicable to prevent anything falling.
- You must ensure that nothing is thrown or tipped from height if it is likely to injure anyone.
- Nothing should be stored in such a way as its movement is likely to injure anyone.
- Any areas in which there is a risk of someone being struck by a falling object must be clearly marked and as far as is reasonably practicable made inaccessible to unauthorised persons.

Employees

Under regulation 14 employees or those working under someone else's control must:

- Report any safety hazard to the employer.
- Use the equipment supplied (including any safety devices), follow any training and instructions (unless they believe it to be unsafe, in which further instructions should be sought before continuing).

For more detailed guidance and informations:

www.uk-legislation.hmso.gov.uk/si/si2005/20050735.htm

www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg401.pdf