

## Working at Height

The hazards of working at height are very often over looked, which is why falls from height continues to be the biggest killer in the construction industry.

On 6 April 2005, The Work at Height Regulations 2005 were introduced. The Regulations apply to all work at height where there is a risk of a fall liable to cause personal injury. They place duties on employers, the self-employed, and any person that controls the work of others to the extent of their control (for example facilities managers or building owners who may contract others to work at height).

The Regulations require duty holders to ensure:

- All work at height is properly planned and organised;
- Those involved in work at height are competent;
- The risks from work at height are assessed and appropriate work equipment is selected and used;
- The risks from working on fragile surfaces are properly controlled; and
- Equipment for work at height is properly inspected and maintained.

The Regulations include Schedules giving requirements for existing places of work and means of access for work at height, collective fall prevention (e.g. guardrails and working platforms), collective fall arrest (e.g. nets, airbags etc), personal fall protection (e.g. work restraints, fall arrest and rope access) and ladders.

Duty holders must:

- Avoid work at height where they can;
- Use work equipment or other measures to prevent falls where they cannot avoid working at height; and
- Where they cannot eliminate the risk of a fall, use work equipment or other measures to minimise the distance and consequences of a fall should one occur.

Prior to the amendment of the Construction (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1996 the height of two metres was given as a baseline height above which appropriate measures had to be in place to prevent falls of persons and objects. In the new regulations this baseline does not exist, measures must be in place whenever there is a risk of a person or object falling a distance that may cause harm to others or property.

When working at height the safest and most appropriate working platform must be used. When making the decision what equipment to use, you must look at what the job includes, how long will it last and where it needs to be done. It is not illegal to use a ladder to work at height but other means of access such as fixed scaffold, tower scaffold or mobile elevated working platforms should be considered, in preference to relying on ladders.

If you are considering using a ladder you must make sure that:

- The work is of short duration and involves only light work
- Three points of contact can be maintained at all times
- The work only requires one hand to be used
- The work can be reached without stretching
- The ladder can be fixed to prevent slipping
- A good handhold is available
- The ladder is safe to use and has been regularly inspected

If a mobile elevated working platform is selected then you must ensure the following:

- Only a suitably trained and competent person operates the platform
- That fall arrest equipment is provided and used by the person or persons inside the platform
- No one in the platform will climb out over the guard rails unless the platform is specifically designed to allow this
- All hand tools are secured to the platform with safety ropes to prevent them falling should they be dropped
- A suitable means of descent from the platform is provided in case of an emergency
- Maintenance and test records (dated within the last 6 months) of the equipment are available for inspection

If a mobile scaffolding tower is selected then you must ensure the following:

- It has been erected by a suitably trained and competent individual
- The relevant components show no signs of rust or damage
- A suitable means of access is provided inside the tower
- Toe boards and guard rails are provided at the suitable heights (Toe board 150mm, intermediate guard rail 470mm and the top guard rail 950mm)
- That weather and ground conditions are properly considered as these may adversely affect the stability of the tower and also its suitability for the task
- That an inspection regime is in place to ensure the tower remains safe at all times

If fixed scaffolding is selected then you must ensure the following:

- That it has been designed, erected, altered and dismantled by a competent person or the work is supervised by a competent person
- It is only erected on a firm level foundation that is capable of taking the load of the scaffold
- It is braced and tied to a permanent structure or otherwise stabilised
- If it is to be loaded then it must be appropriately altered to withstand the extra weight
- That platforms are fully boarded and wide enough for work and access
- That scaffold boards are properly supported and do not over hang excessively i.e. More than four times its thickness
- That there is a safe ladder or other means of access to the platform. If a ladder is used it must be tied off and extend at least one metre above the platform to provide a safe handhold
- It is regularly inspected and formal detailed inspections are made at least every 7 days or sooner if something occurs that may have affected its strength and/or stability

In summary, if your work involves working at height then you must ensure the safety of your employees and the general public by ensuring the most appropriate working platform is selected and that these are well maintained, the staff used to operate or erect them are competent to do so and that all appropriate safety measures have been implemented i.e. Guardrails, fall arrest equipment and safety signage are supplied

For further information on this topic please refer to <http://www.hse.gov.uk/falls/index.htm>

Ref: C008:05 HSC Work at Height Regulations laid in Parliament  
INDG401 - The Work at Height Regulations 2005 - A brief guide  
Height Safe – absolutely essential health and safety information for people who work at height  
CIS10 Tower Scaffolds,  
CIS49 General Access Scaffolds and Ladders,  
HSG150 Health and Safety in Construction  
Preventing falls from boom-type mobile elevating work platforms Misc 614

