



Ashdown Safety

Working at Height

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Working at height is defined as:

- *'work in any place, including a place at or below ground level, or obtaining access to or egress from such a place, while at work, except by a staircase where, if suitable measures were not taken, a person could fall a distance likely to cause personal injury'*

The facts

- Falling from a height of just one or two steps can cause serious injury. Work at any height can cause injury.
- In 2018/19 falls from height accounted for 8% of employer-reported non-fatal injuries whilst in the construction industry this figure was 19%.
- Ladders are probably the most used and misused pieces of access equipment.
- Most ladder accidents occur because the ladder is not secured at the top.
- For 5 years work at height has been the single biggest cause of workplace deaths - with 40 people killed in 2018/19
- Unsuitable access equipment (such as chairs and tables) can cause serious accidents even in low risk premises such as offices and schools.
- It is important to ensure that contractors working on an organisation's premises (for example for roof maintenance or window cleaning) are properly controlled and do not work in a dangerous way.

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Hierarchy of risk control

- Keep away from working at height wherever possible by changing the task or the way it can be carried out.
- Use other control measures to prevent falls.
- Always consider fall prevention measures, e.g. edge protection and personal protection such as harnesses.
- Reduce the likelihood of injury by minimising the distance to fall or its consequences
Always consider safety netting, over active measures, such as having to clip a safety harness on to a structure.
- Take account of how storage areas and high shelving or wall displays are accessed in lower risk areas.

Guidelines to employers

- Plan, organise and supervise all work at height
- ensure employees are appropriately trained in safe working methods and the equipment to be used
- make sure all those involved are competent and trained
- assess the risks and ensure that appropriate work equipment is selected and used correctly
- manage the risks from fragile surfaces, such as thin roofing materials or skylights
- inspect and maintain all equipment and workplaces intended to control the risks of working at height
- take account of weather conditions
- ensure planning includes arrangements for emergencies and rescue
- manage risks from falling objects.

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Prosecutions

- After a 16-year-old apprentice joiner fell approximately four metres from a scaffold platform, a scaffolding company was fined £100,000 and ordered to pay £918 in costs in February 2018. The apprentice was passing roof tiles from the loading bay to a colleague on the scaffold when he caught his foot in a gap between the scaffold platform and the loading bay. He fell backwards under a single guard rail to the ground below, sustaining severe injuries. The loading bay edge protection did not include an intermediate guard-rail or toe board.
- Modus Workspace Ltd (a London-based relocation and refurbishment company) was fined £1.1m and ordered to pay costs of £68,116 in May 202, after a worker was seriously injured when he fell from height. As an engineer testing a sprinkler system for leaks he had climbed onto an internal roof to inspect the leak from an extension ladder. The ladder slipped and he fell almost three metres into the gap between the internal roof and external wall. The worker lost almost half of the blood in his body and sustained life changing injuries. The HSE concluded that reasonably practicable measures had not been taken to prevent the engineer's fall and that this serious incident and devastation could have been avoided if basic safety measures had been put in place.
- Fruehauf Limited was fined £200,000 and ordered to pay costs of £5,622 after a worker sustained fatal injuries from falling from a cherry picker at a factory in Grantham. The 64-year old worker fell while climbing from the basket of a cherry picker onto an over-head travelling crane to repair it. The work was not properly planned and was carried out without suitable harnesses and fall arrest equipment.

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Legal Duties

- The Work at Height Regulations 2005 (as amended) apply to all work at height when there is a risk of a fall liable to cause personal injury. Duties are placed on employers, the self-employed and any person who controls the work of others (eg facilities managers or building owners who employ contractors to work at height).
- Where the means of making the work at height safe involves fixing points, such as eye bolts, running wires, fixed rail etc, there are legal requirements under the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 (LOLER) or the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER), for them to be suitably inspected. In the case where people are suspended or lifted there are specific requirements for thorough examinations at no more than six monthly intervals with inspection records being retained.



Please contact us using our contact form if you have any queries regarding our Health and Safety services, or if you would like to order.

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References:

1. Barbour (barbour.info)
2. www.hse.gov.uk