

Working At Height: The Basics

Taken from the 'Height Aware' campaign by the Health and Safety Executive 2006

More information is available on the HSE website www.hse.gov.uk/falls and from the HSE Infoline on 0845 345 0055

① What is work at height?

Work at height means work in any place where, if precautions were not taken, a person could fall down and injure themselves.

If you:

- work above ground level;
- could fall from an edge, through an opening or fragile surface; or
- could fall from ground level into an opening in a floor or hole in the ground;

you will be working at height, because you can fall from one level to another.

Examples of work at height include:

- using working platforms such as scaffolds, tower scaffolds, cherry pickers, scissor lifts and podium steps;
- work on a roof, piece of plant or equipment;
- using ladders or stepladders.

② What precautions do you need to take?

Remember, work at height may be a one off, or routine. You will need to make sure you identify all tasks, which require work at height, so you can make sure they are carried out safely. The key to preventing injury from work at height is to carry out a risk assessment, so you can choose the right precautions.

③ Preventing fall of materials

You should prevent the **fall of tools** or materials by using **tool belts** and other methods. Where falls cannot be prevented or completely avoided, set up exclusion zones, eg fencing. If you cannot set up effective zones in areas with public access, you will have to take other measures. Materials, tools or debris should never be thrown down (bombed) from height.

④ Checks and inspection

You will need to undertake checks and inspections:

new equipment should be checked to make sure it is appropriate for the intended use, that it operates

- correctly and that it is in good condition;
- all equipment should be checked before each use;
- in addition to pre-use checks, equipment should have a detailed inspection by a competent person in accordance with a schedule drawn up by them;
- interim inspections should be made between the inspections by the competent person where a hazard that could cause significant deterioration in the equipment is present, eg use in acidic or alkaline environments or grit blasting etc;
- damaged equipment must be taken out of service immediately. **Even a small cut in the webbing can seriously affect performance.**

You will need to make sure that people using the equipment:

- are competent to check their equipment for defects and do this before every use;
- are suitably trained and assessed for competency in the use of their personal fall protection systems and equipment for the particular application;
- have read and understood the product information before using the equipment;
- have checked that the components in the system are compatible.