

THE SAFE USE OF ACCESS EQUIPMENT

Your Practical Guide



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Contents

• Introduction	4
• Competent Persons	4
• General Principles	5
• Ladders, Stepladders and Trestles	6
• General Access Scaffolds	8
• Scaffold Towers	9
• Handover and Naming of Scaffolding	10
• Power-Operated Mobile Work Platforms	11

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Introduction

Many injuries at work occur because access equipment has been incorrectly selected, erected, used or maintained. Access equipment is frequently used for short periods or in emergencies, and insufficient consideration is given to devising a safe method of work.

For each task, a risk assessment should be completed and a suitable means of access chosen. This evaluation should take into account:

- the work to be done
- the duration of the task
- the working environment
- the capabilities of the person or people carrying out the task.

There are many different types of access equipment. This guidance document therefore covers general principles and is not a comprehensive list of rules. Although we recommend contractors follow the guidance, this does not relieve a contractor of his contractual and statutory duties.

The guidance covers the general safety principles that apply to the following equipment:

- Ladders, stepladders and trestles
- General access scaffolds
- Scaffold towers
- Mast-elevated work platforms
- Power-operated work platforms.

Other highly specialised equipment is available, and the general principles described here will apply to their use. Usually they have been specially designed for a particular task, and the operator instructions and other information supplied by the manufacturer must always be followed.

Competent Persons

A competent person needs to be appointed to control all work activities involving the use of access equipment.

General Principles

Accidents using access equipment occur because one or more of the following problems either has not been controlled in advance, or was thought to be an acceptable risk under the circumstances.

Design and Selection

- The access structure itself has been faultily designed
- Inappropriate equipment has been selected where safer alternatives could be used.

Failure of Equipment

- A base support fails or subsides
- The suspension equipment suffers a structural failure
- The components suffer a structural failure
- Overloading results in a structural failure
- A structural failure occurs because of poor erection, inspection or maintenance
- Overbalancing results in a structural failure
- Electrical or hydraulic equipment fails.

Operator Error

- The structure becomes unstable through misuse and misunderstanding
- Operators over-reaching and overbalancing
- They climb the equipment whilst carrying loads
- They wear the wrong footwear, or fail to make sure surfaces are not slippery, or fail to clean either their footwear or the surfaces of the equipment
- Operators fall from working platforms
- Operators make unauthorised alterations to the equipment or use it in an unauthorised way
- Operators make contact with structural elements (i.e. parts of the building or structure being worked on causing damage)
- They are trapped by moving parts.

Ladders, Stepladders and Trestles

Ladders, stepladders and trestles – whether timber or aluminium:

- must be kept in good condition and free from visible defects
- must be regularly inspected
- must be entered in a record or register of all the ladders etc. that are in use.
- must not be painted

Inspections, records and storage

All ladders, stepladders and trestles should be numbered and recorded in a register that is held by the person in charge of such equipment.

The equipment must be inspected before each period of use, and at regular intervals whilst it is in use.

The notes for use during inspections have been produced as a supplement to this guidance document.

Any piece of equipment found to be defective must be labelled unserviceable, and returned to the person in charge of it for repair or disposal.

Ladders, stepladders and trestles should be stored in a cool, dry area, preferably in a horizontal position. They should not to be stored in the open air unless they are suitably protected.

Casual borrowing or misappropriation of equipment should be discouraged.

Use of Ladders

Check visually that the ladder is in good condition and there are no deposits or substances on it that might cause someone to slip.

Check the facilities that are available for securing the ladder so that it cannot slip

- can it be tied at the top, or secured at the bottom, or
- if it is no more than 5m tall, can it be footed by a second person?

Ensure the rung at the step-off point is level with the working platform or other access point, and that the ladder rises at least 1m (3'6") above this point, unless there is a separate handhold.

The correct angle of rest is approximately 75 degrees (corresponds to a ratio of

one unit horizontally at the foot for every four units vertically).

Stiles (upright sections) should be evenly and adequately supported.

Metal ladders (and wooden ladders when wet) are conductors of electricity and should not be placed near, or carried beneath, low power lines.

Use of Stepladders

Stepladders are not designed to accept side loading.

Chains or ropes to prevent overspreading are required, or other fittings designed to achieve the same results. Parts should be fully extended.

Stepladders should be levelled for stability on a firm base.

Work should not be carried out from the top step.

Over-reaching should be avoided by moving the stepladder – if this is not possible, another method of access should be considered.

Equipment should be maintained free from defects, and not painted except for identification marking.

No more than one person should use a stepladder at one time.

Use of Trestles

Trestles are suitable for short duration work only, and as board supports.

They should be free from defects and inspected regularly.

Trestles should be levelled for stability on a firm base.

Platforms based on trestles should be fully boarded, adequately supported and provided with edge protection where appropriate.

Safe means of access should be provided to trestle platforms, usually by stepladders.

General Access Scaffolds

There are three main types of access scaffolds commonly constructed from steel tubing, or available in commercial patented sections. These are:

- Independent tied scaffolds, which are temporary structures, independent of the structure to which access is required, but tied to it for stability
- Putlog scaffolds, which rely upon the building (usually under construction) to provide structural support to the temporary scaffold structure through an arrangement of putlog tubes placed into the wall
- Birdcage scaffolds, which are independent structures normally erected for interior work that have a large area and normally only a single working platform.

Use of General Access Scaffolds

Select the correct design with an adequate load bearing capacity.

Ensure adequate foundations are available for the loads to be imposed.

The structural elements of the scaffold should be maintained in good condition.

Structures should be erected by competent persons, or under the close supervision of a competent person, in accordance with any design provided by the manufacturer or supplier and with the applicable British Standard.

All working platforms should be fully boarded, with adequate edge protection, including handrails or other forms of fall protection, nets, brick guards and toe boards to prevent materials or people falling from the platforms.

All materials resting on the platforms should be safely stacked, with no overloading.

Adequate and safe means of access should be provided to working platforms.

Once the scaffolding has been erected, unauthorised alterations to it should be prohibited.

Inspections of the structure are required, first upon completion and then at appropriate intervals afterwards, usually weekly and after poor weather conditions. Details of the results should be entered into an inspection register or logbook.

Scaffold Towers

Scaffold towers are available commercially in forms that are comparatively easy to construct. They may also be erected from traditional steel tubing and couplers. In either form, competent and trained personnel are required to ensure that all the necessary components are present and in the right place. Many accidents have occurred because of poor erection standards; a further common cause is overturning.

Use of Scaffold Towers

Scaffold towers must be erected in accordance with the manufacturer's or supplier's recommendations.

Erection must be carried out by experienced, competent persons.

Towers must be sited on a firm level base, with wheel castors locked if they are provided.

The scaffold equipment should be in good condition, free from patent defects including bent or twisted sections, and properly maintained.

The structure should be braced in all planes, to distribute loads correctly and to prevent twisting and collapse.

The ratio of the minimum base dimension to the height of the working platform should not exceed 1:3 in external use, and 1:3.5 in internal use, unless the tower is permanently secured to another permanent structure. Base ratios can be increased by the use of outriggers, but these should be fully extended and at all times capable of taking whatever loads may be imposed.

Free standing towers should not be used above 9.75m (30ft) unless they are tied in position. The maximum height when tied should not exceed 12m (40ft).

A safe means of access should be provided on the narrowest side of the tower. This can be by a vertical ladder attached internally, by internal stairways, or by ladder sections designed to form part of the frame members. It is not acceptable to climb frame members that have not been designed for the purpose.

Trapdoors should be provided in working platforms where internal access is provided.

Platforms should be fully supported and fully boarded.

Guardrails, mid rails, toe-boards and other appropriate means should be provided to prevent workers and/or materials from falling.

Mobile scaffold towers should never be moved while people are still on the platform. This is highly dangerous and a significant cause of falls and injury.

Ladders or stepladders must not be placed on the tower platform to gain extra height for working.

Handover and Naming of Scaffolding

Where a specialist scaffolding contractor erects the scaffolding for the use of other contractors, a formal handover procedure is required, and a certificate must be issued.

The handover procedure must consist of a final inspection of the scaffold by the erecting company, followed by the issue of a handover certificate to the users.

In all cases, copies of the certificate must be given to the on site Manager or Supervisor.

For safety and industrial reasons, the scaffold contractor should affix nameplates to his scaffold structures at suitable intervals so as to indicate who has the responsibility for erection, alterations and dismantling.

Power-Operated Mobile Work Platforms

A wide variety of equipment falls into this category, ranging from small mobile tower structures with self-elevating facilities, to large vehicle-mounted hydraulically-operated platforms.

Use of Power-Operated Mobile Work Platforms

The operator's controls should be at the platform level, with an override at ground level for emergencies.

A levelling device should be fitted to the chassis to ensure verticality in use.

The equipment should not be used during adverse weather conditions, and if necessary operatives should be supervised to make sure this does not happen.

Outriggers, where provided for increased stability, should be fully extended and locked into position before the equipment is used/raised in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. The wheels may also need to be locked.

Materials and/or persons should not be transferred to and from the platform while it is in the raised position.

Training must be given to the operators before they are allowed to use the equipment in field conditions unsupervised.

When fitted, scissor mechanisms require the provision of adequate fixed guards, so as to prevent the operator or others being trapped in the scissor mechanism during raising or lowering.

The equipment requires regular inspection, servicing, maintenance and testing in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

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