

WORKING AT HEIGHT

Your Practical Guide



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Introduction

Buildings and structures etc., vary so diversely that no attempt has been made in this information sheet to deal with every situation you might encounter.

Instead, this guide concentrates on the general principles that should be followed by everyone who needs to work above ground level – whether they are employees or contractors – so that accidents caused by falls can be avoided.

These principles apply to all work situations above ground level – the objective is that there should be a secure foot-hold and hand-hold, particularly when there is a danger of falling more than 2 metres.

Assessment & Planning

Before starting work, each situation should be assessed to determine the best method for obtaining access to the elevated situation where the work needs to be done. These are the main factors you should take into consideration during this assessment:

- How long do you estimate the activity will take?
- How complex is the task?
- How many component parts need to be handled?
- How big and heavy are they?
- How high above ground level must the work be done?
- How much moving around horizontally will it be necessary to do at the elevated situation?
- What kind of access equipment is available?
- Is any additional equipment required for safe and economic working? (For example, is it necessary to hire a hydraulic platform?).
- Are suitably trained and experienced personnel available?
- How much supervision will be required?

When allocating work other than simple tasks, the access and work method must be discussed between those involved and supervisory staff. If necessary, a written work method must be issued for complex situations; this is called a method statement. No material deviation from the method statement can be permitted without prior discussion with the supervisory staff.

Ladders

A ladder must only be used in circumstances where it can't slip outwards or sideways.

These are the precautions you should be taking:

- Position the foot of the ladder to take account of the nature of the ground on which it is standing. Suitable measures to take include using proprietary non-slip devices to ensure that the ladder foot can't slip. Secure the ladder at the top wherever practicable.
- Where securing at the top is impracticable, arrangements should be made to prevent the ladder from slipping outwards or sideways. Methods of securing at the base include fixed blocks or cleats, sandbags or stakes embedded in the ground. Additionally, to help prevent slipping, most ladders can be fixed at the foot with pads, caps or sleeves.
- In circumstances where it is impracticable to fix the ladder at the top or at the foot, a second person should be stationed at the foot to prevent slipping; this precaution, however, is effective only for ladders not more than 6m in overall length. The person 'footing' should face the ladder with a hand on each stile and with one foot resting on the bottom rung.
- Ladders with rung reinforcement should be used with the reinforcement beneath the rungs.
- Overreaching at the working position is a common cause of falls; to avoid this, the ladder should be repositioned as the work progresses. Accompany each movement by the procedure above.
- When climbing or descending, it is important to have both hands free, so don't hold tools or equipment. Such items should be either carried in a holster attached to a belt or raised/lowered on a hoist line while at the working position. Throwing or dropping such items must not be permitted.
- Before ascending, footwear should be checked to ensure that there is nothing that can cause the feet to slip from a rung (e.g. mud, oil or water). Particular care is needed during adverse weather conditions which may render rungs wet or icy.
- Stepladders should only be used with the feet spread to their fullest extent and the top step should not be used as a workplace unless there is an additional handhold (e.g. an extension to the step ladder or a part of the building or structure that is being worked upon).

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.

Mobile Tower Scaffolds

Only use mobile tower scaffolds in accordance with the maker/hirer's instructions, and ensure that you receive erection instructions when collecting from hirers. Guidelines you should follow include:

- where possible, the scaffold should be rigidly tied to the structure being worked upon
- if outdoors, the scaffold height/base ratio should not exceed 3:1, (e.g. 6m high for 2m base). This may be increased to 3.5:1, (e.g. 7m high for 2m base) for indoor situations, or where there is no appreciable wind loading
- castors should be braked when the tower is in use
- the platform at the working level should preferably be fully boarded, but in any case needs to be a minimum of 600mm wide. Where the height is greater than 2m, fit guard rails (height between 910mm and 1150mm and toe boards (height 150mm).
- the access ladder should only be fitted to the narrow side and may be internal vertical or raking, or external raking. Don't allow people to climb the structure of the scaffold itself.
- make proper use of the adjustable legs to ensure staging stability.
- movement of the scaffold must take place only after everyone has left the platform. The force applied to move the scaffold should be applied at or near the base. After movement, castors should be braked and vertical alignment checked.
- the maximum permitted loading will be stated by the maker/hirers. This should not be exceeded during use.
- as when working with ladders, tools and equipment should be raised or lowered using a hoist line or carried in a belt with holster. Throwing or dropping such items must not be permitted. Both hands should be free to facilitate safe access/egress.

Hydraulic Working Platforms

Only allow trained people to use this type of equipment. Follow specific instructions and training provided by the maker/hirer of the equipment but bear these points in mind:

- don't exceed the safe working load
- use outriggers correctly (if they are fitted). Don't use outriggers on one side only.
- put up barriers or use traffic cones to ensure the working site is safe
- use a hoist line to raise and lower tools and equipment, unless they have been placed inside the working platform before elevation. Don't allow anyone to throw or drop such items.
- where harness-anchoring points are provided, use a harness (see over).

Safety Harnesses

In situations where there is no secure handhold and a person may fall a distance greater than 2 metres, safety harnesses must be used where practicable.

- Harnesses must only be attached to anchor points that are known to be capable of taking a person's weight.
- Inspect all parts of the harness assembly immediately prior to use, and don't use it if there are visible signs of wear.
- Don't allow anyone to work alone when safety harnesses are being worn.

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