

Working at Height

Falls from height remain one of the most common causes of workplace fatalities.

In Great Britain 2019/20 there were 29 fatalities, and over 5,000 injuries that caused the injured person to be off work for over 7 days or more, due to a fall from height.

Before working at height make sure:

- Work is properly planned and organised and you have suitable access equipment.
- Fragile materials on roofs have been identified and precautions are taken.
- That adequate guardrails, barriers or any other means of protection are provided.
- Work platforms are capable of supporting people, their work equipment and materials.
- Where access ladders rise above 9 m, a safe intermediate platform is provided at suitable intervals.
- Ladders are rested at the correct angle (1 unit out for 4 units up), extend at least 1m above the stepping-off point and are secured, top and bottom.

When working at height:

- Ensure that any working platform is safe and secure whether static or mobile. Mobile platforms must have outriggers to improve their stability.
- Fit handrails, toe boards etc, sufficiently wide to walk on without the risk of tumbling or losing balance.
- Use safety nets, safety harnesses or fall-arrest devices to prevent falls.
- Supply and use anchorage points for safety harnesses and ladders.
- Anticipate adverse weather conditions.
- Scrape mud off boots before climbing ladders.
- Do not over-reach on ladders and platforms.
- Do not allow rubbish to accumulate. Use a chute or lower materials properly.

Safe working practices include:

- Using only trained and competent personnel.
- Risk assessment and the selection of appropriate equipment.
- The provision of crawling boards or ladders where the roof is liable to collapse under a person's weight or the roof has a pitch above 10 degrees.
- Preventing unauthorised access to roofs, roof-spaces, chimney stacks, etc.
- Only using ladders for light work of short duration, where there is no safer alternative and the ladder is properly secured and a secure handhold can be maintained on the ladder at all times.
- Regularly inspecting and maintaining all access equipment prior to use and after adverse conditions.
- Ensuring that inspections of scaffolding are undertaken before use, every week, and after events such as storms or vehicle impacts, by a competent person.
- Having a clear rescue plan for rescuing those who fall but are left suspended by fall arrest equipment.
- Covering or guarding roof light openings and fragile materials through which people may fall.

Remember: there is no safe height to fall from so avoid working at height where possible.
