



Hardfacts

Norwich Union Risk Services

Ref No 5060 (v3)

January 2007

Working at Height - Introduction

A total of 46 people died from falls whilst working at height during 2005/06. For a number of years the annual average has been around 70. Falls cause around 4000 major injuries in the workplace each year. Falls are the single biggest cause of workplace deaths and the second most common cause of major injuries. But falls can be prevented by careful management of work at height.

Nature of the Problem

All industry sectors are exposed to the risks presented by work at height although the incidence varies considerably. There are two main categories of fall:

- High falls (over 2m) mainly from ladders and roofs which occur most frequently in Agriculture and Construction
- Low falls (less than 2m and not including slips or trips at ground level) mainly from ladders and scaffolds which are more common in the Manufacturing and Service sectors

Fatal Injuries

Falls from height are the most common cause of fatal injuries to employees and the self-employed. High falls are the biggest cause of fatal injury. On average, half and two thirds of fatal injuries resulting from a fall from height happen in construction, with the remaining 50% spread across other industries.

Major Injuries and Over 3-Day Injuries

Falls from height are the second most common cause of major injuries to employees and the most common for the self-employed. It is the fourth most common cause of over 3-day injury to employees and the self-employed.

Common Factors

Most accidents involving falls could have been prevented if the right equipment had been provided, if it had been adequately maintained and was properly used. But experience shows that as many falls arise

due to poor management as are caused by equipment failure. Key faults include a failure;

- to recognise a problem.
- to ensure that safe systems of work are followed.
- to provide safe systems of work.
- To supply adequate information, instruction, training or supervision provided.
- to ensure use equipment supplied.
- to provide safe plant/equipment.

However, the best approach is to eliminate work at height if possible

Causes

The main causes of falls are;

- Ladders primarily from moveable ladders
- Scaffolding - primarily from general access scaffolds
- Work area/platform
- Vehicles
- Roof edge
- Stairs
- Fragile roofs
- Gangways/catwalks

The most common incidents involve over-reaching, over-balancing, equipment failure, misuse of equipment, unexpected movement (particularly where ladders are involved) and the failure of a fragile surface.

Legal Requirements

There are a number of Health and Safety Regulations relating to work at height but Work at Height Regulations (WAHR) which came into effect in April 2005 consolidated and clarified the requirements.

Despite the new legislation the basic legal requirements governing work at height are unchanged and require that:

- Work at height be avoided where possible
- Safe systems of work be used
- Risk assessments must be carried out
- The correct equipment is used at all times
- Equipment be maintained in good order
- Adequate precautions are taken to prevent falls and falling objects.

Work at Height Regulations

These Regulations implement the EU Temporary Work at Height Directive. The Regulations aim to reduce accidents caused by work at height. They cover the selection and use of equipment as well as training for work at height.

There are a number of specific points in the regulations that include the following:

- Work on fragile roofs
- Risks from falling objects
- Provision of working platforms fitted with suitable and sufficient guardrails and toe boards
- Inspection of equipment provided for work at height including scaffolds, harnesses and lanyards

The Regulations also introduce two new concepts

- "Collective" safeguards: These provide protection for all workers and include such as scaffolds, guardrails and toe boards, netting, roof edge protection
- "Personal fall protection systems": Equipment such as harnesses and lanyards whose function and purpose is to prevent serious injury for an individual worker should a fall occur

WAHR does not ban or prohibit the use of ladders. However, it is clearly set out that ladders should be primarily viewed as a means of access, for example to a working platform. If a ladder is to be used to carry out work it must be of low risk and short duration.

Legal responsibilities for others

Both employers and the self-employed have a legal duty to ensure that their work activities do not put others at risk and to share information relating to any required emergency procedures and information.

Key Action Points

Consider whether there are other, safer ways of doing the job. Can work at height be avoided?

Ensure that you have fully considered all of the ways in which you or your employees could be at risk of falling.

Don't underestimate the risks involved. Simply 'taking care' is not enough. Proper precautions must be in place.

Don't start work at height until you have properly planned the work and assessed and controlled the risks involved.

Decide what equipment is required for the job. Ideally precautions should be designed to prevent a fall, for example using guard rails at a roof edge or crawling boards on a fragile roof. For some jobs it may be appropriate to use fall arrest equipment such as a safety harness and lanyard.

If you have not got the appropriate equipment then get it. Don't take a chance with a ladder if what you should be using is a tower scaffold. Making do without the right equipment to speed up the work or minimise expense can lead to injury or death, as well as prosecution if the law is broken.

Ensure that there are no defects in any equipment that you use.

Make sure that equipment is used safely and that any necessary training or supervision is provided.

References

The Work at Height Regulations 2005 a brief guide. INDG 401 HSE Books

HSE priced and free publications are available by mail order from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA Tel: 01787 881165 Fax: 01787 313995.

Note: Many free publications on work at height can be downloaded from the HSE web page – using the following links:
HSE Falls/Work at Height web page:
www.hse.gov.uk/falls/index.htm

HSE Height Aware Campaign
www.hse.gov.uk/falls/campaign/materials.htm

HSC: Workplace Fatalities – Falls from Height
www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/pdf/rhsfalls/pdf

Hardfacts:

5049 - Safe Working at Height for the Self Employed

5059 - Work at Height Regulations 2005

Ref No 5060 (v3)

January 2007

Norwich Union Risk Services operates a Risk Helpline during normal business hours for the cost of a local telephone call. The telephone number is:
0845 366 66 66
www.nu-riskservices.co.uk