



WORKING AT HEIGHT

Your Practical Guide



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Introduction

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 risk.

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.

Further detailed guidance is available on the HSE website:
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg401.pdf>

Assessment & Planning

Before starting work, each situation should be assessed to determine the safest way to access the height where the work needs to be done. These are the main factors for 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 be necessary 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.

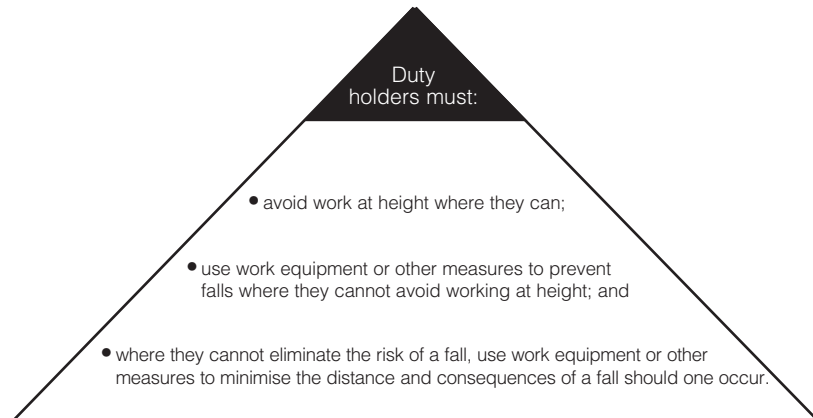
Work at Height

The Management of Health Safety at Work Regulations supported by the Work at Height Regulations, require you to make an assessment of the risks presented by working at height – before any work begins. You should therefore appoint someone who is competent to undertake such an assessment, based on the following guidelines.

In 2004/2005 53 people died and nearly 3800 suffered a serious injury as a result of a fall from height in the workplace.

Falls from height are the most common cause of fatal injury and the second most common cause of major injury to employees, accounting for around 15% of all such injuries.

The diagram below indicates the route endorsed by the HSE under the new regulations and the general approach to work at height that must now be followed.



Do not undertake work at height unless:

- all work at height is properly planned and organised;
- all work at height takes account of weather conditions that could endanger health and safety;
- those involved in work at height are trained and competent;

- the place where work at height is done is safe
- equipment for work at height is appropriately inspected
- the risks from fragile surfaces are properly controlled and
- the risks from falling objects are properly controlled

It is essential that you;

- ensure that no work is done at height if it is safe and reasonably practical to do it other than at height
- ensure that the work is properly planned, appropriately supervised, and carried out in as safe a way as is possible
- plan for emergencies and rescue
- ensure that the work is postponed while weather conditions endanger health or safety
- ensure that everyone involved in the work is competent (or, if being trained is supervised by a competent person). This includes involvement in organisation, planning, supervision, and the supply and maintenance of equipment
- take account of the risk assessment carried out under regulation 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations
- have assessed the risks involved, particularly with regard to providing safe access and exit to the working area
- provide other means of protection for employees and members of the public who may be affected by the work that is being carried out
- carefully consider what can be done to prevent accidental falls and protecting people if they do fall - for example, the use of safety nets, air mats, air cushions or harnesses
- if using harnesses, have a rescue plan and test it to ensure that it works. The plan must include how to retrieve a person suspended in a harness and instructing employees in how to inspect, wear and secure harnesses safely.

Fragile Surfaces

You must ensure that no one working under your control goes onto or near a fragile surface unless that is the only reasonably practicable way for the worker to carry out the work safely, having regard to the demands of the task, equipment, or working environment.

If anyone does work on or near a fragile surface you must:

- ensure (as far as it is reasonably practicable to do so) that suitable platforms, coverings, guard rails, and the like are provided (and used) to minimise the risk
- do all that is reasonably practicable, if any risk of a fall remains, to minimise the distance and effect of a fall
- If anyone working under your control may go onto or near a fragile surface, you must do all that is reasonably practicable to make them aware of the danger, preferably by prominent warning notices fixed at the approaches to the danger zone.

Ensure that any working platform is secure and that it has been designed to support the weight of the employees plus any materials or equipment that may be used on it.

Secure scaffolds to a supporting structure (unless they have been designed to be free standing).

Regularly inspect and clean scaffold boards and access points, and maintain them in good order. This is very important where scaffolding is used by a number of trades.

Carry out a thorough assessment of the ground conditions before using mobile elevated work platforms. Remember they may become unstable and overturn on rough or uneven ground.

Remember to assess overhead obstructions. This is particularly important if you are working close to overhead power lines. Specific clearance distances from overhead cables are required by law* (*www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ais8.pdf) and these vary for steel pylons and wooden posts. If in doubt, contact the local Electricity Supply Company for further guidance.

Working at height GENERAL GUIDANCE FOR WORKING AT HEIGHT

Pay particular attention to the danger points from which people could fall. These include all exposed edges and openings on scaffolds or structures – such as the edges of roofs or work platforms and floor openings. They must be fitted with proper guardrails, mid-rails, toe boards, brick guards or gates. Ensure that fragile roof surfaces are clearly identified and if necessary fitted with grilles or scaffold grids to stop anyone falling through them. Guard too against the risk of debris falling from above. If materials and debris are being removed or accumulated at height, use suitable chutes, debris netting, or other debris retention devices.

Consider carefully the use of trestles and ladders. These are often used for inappropriate working activities. Ladders must always be inspected prior to use and must be secured. The use of trestles as a working platform should be avoided where possible.

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 taking into 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 impractical, arrangements should be made to prevent the ladder from slipping outwards or sideways. Methods of securing 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 impractical 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 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
- Whilst working, do not stretch beyond your reach as this 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, do not hold/carry 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
- 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, and 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
- 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.

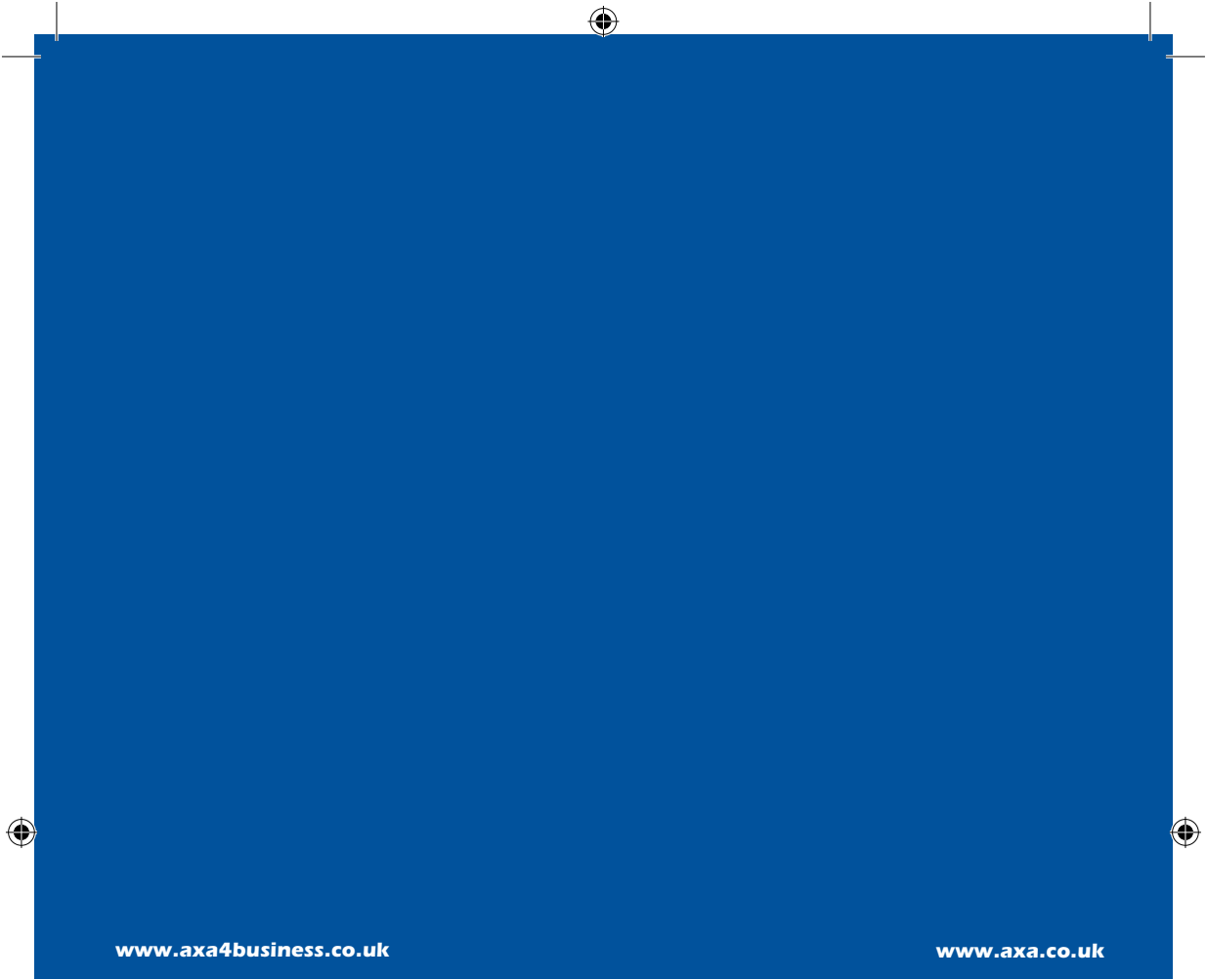
Hydraulic Working Platforms

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 (refer to manufacturers guidelines for permitted 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
- Make sure you inspect the ground conditions before use to ensure that there are no obstructions or trenches that could affect stability of the equipment
- Never use the equipment in severe weather conditions but particularly during periods of high winds.







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