

## **Access platforms cut the cost of maintenance and improve safety when working at height, and are competitive with repeated erection costs for temporary scaffolding**

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Within the manufacturing and process industries, huge efforts have been made in recent years to streamline production, optimise processes and, thereby, minimise production costs.

Nonetheless, in the present economic climate there is still a need to reduce overheads, so many companies are seeking ways to cut their maintenance spend.

With large process and manufacturing plant, maintenance access is often gained by means of scaffolding - either of the traditional or tower type - or with mobile powered access platforms.

But few maintenance and facilities managers appreciate the true cost of these methods.

For example, taking into account the time to obtain a scaffold from an outside contractor or from within the company's own stores, plus the erection time, disruption at floor-level while the scaffold is in place, and the time to dismantle and return the scaffold, this approach is relatively expensive.

It is estimated that if a scaffold has to be erected on three or more occasions to gain access to plant, it usually would have been cheaper to have had bespoke access platforms constructed and installed.

If suitable platforms, walkways and fixed ladders are in place, no time is needed to assemble the means of access, and the labour requirement is often reduced from two or more down to one.

There is also no disruption to production caused by scaffolding obstructing access at floor level, and bespoke access platforms often provide better access than tower scaffolding because they can be designed to reach over and around plant.

Moreover, in the case of emergency maintenance following an unplanned stoppage, access can be gained immediately so that downtime is minimised.

In addition, companies that have installed access platforms often find that easier access means that maintenance takes place more frequently, leading to higher quality production with more consistent output.

Safety is not compromised when access platforms are used, as guard rails are designed at the outset and permanently fixed in position (according to data from the Health and Safety Executive, around 50 per cent of fatalities involving machinery are associated with maintenance and, in 2001/2002, 68 people died and nearly 4000 suffered a serious injury as a result of a fall from height in the workplace).

Aside from reducing the cost of maintenance and improving safety, custom-designed access platforms can also provide the optimum location from which to control processes, view production or replenish hoppers of raw materials.

Article taken from Processing Talk.