Simplifying Compliance

P4P Compliance Management Limited

Working at Height Guide

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Introduction

Workplace falls remain the primary source of fatal and severe injuries in the UK. Site owners and supervisors hold the duty to safeguard those accessing the premises, ensuring they possess proper training and expertise. Regrettably, many incidents stem from insufficient safety precautions and tools.

This guide aims to provide an understanding of the risks associated with working at height, how to effectively manage them, and comply with the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

Working at height is one of the most hazardous tasks in the construction industry. There are legal requirements and guidance in place to ensure safety and protection for all parties involved.

Along with the Health and Safety at Work Act, The Work at Height Regulations 2005 outlines the general duties that employers, employees, and self-employed individuals have towards ensuring health and safety in the workplace, including when working at height.

To ensure safety when working at heights, it is important to follow a hierarchy of controls, starting with the question of whether the work can be done from the ground. If not, can other safety equipment be considered before resorting to fall restraints or safety netting? These options should only be used as a last resort.

This guide explores the regulations, implications, and best practices for organisations to ensure safety and compliance when working at heights. It aims to provide a clear understanding of the legal and practical aspects of these regulations to promote a safer work environment.

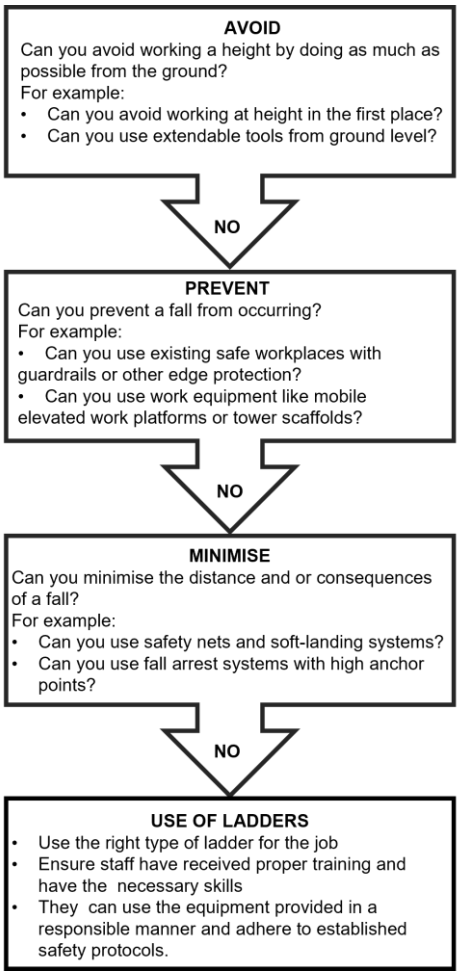
Hierarchy of Controls

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Hierarchy of Controls for working at height step-by-step guide emphasises the priority is to avoid, by eliminating the need for working at height through design and planning. Consider doing as much work as possible from the ground or using extendable tools from ground level.

If it is not possible to avoid working at heigh, you must consider the risk of a person falling from height and put measures in place to prevent an incident.
Use of a Mobile Elevating Work Platforms (MEWPs) scissor lifts, or scaffolding should be considered.

If the risk of a person falling remains, you must take sufficient measures to minimise the distance and/or consequences of a fall.
Using safety nets or fall arrest systems and equipment for working at heights can provide anchorages, harnesses, rescue and evacuation equipment.

Ladders and stepladders can be a practical option for low-risk and short-duration tasks.
To minimize the risk, workers should be trained to effectively use the appropriate ladder for the task at hand.



Roles and Responsibilities

The working at height regulations apply to employers, employees, and self-employed individuals.

Employer Responsibilities

Employers must follow working at height legal requirements, and health and safety regulations.
Have a comprehensive risk management strategy in place, document, and report any hazards identified.
They are responsible to ensure the safety of their employees and members of the public when working at height.
Provide workers with appropriate training and ensure they are qualified in safe methods of working and supervised where necessary to minimise risks.
They are also responsible for providing and maintaining the necessary equipment for employees when working at height.

Employee Responsibilities

Employees have a responsibility to ensure their own safety and the safety of their colleagues and the public when working at height. This includes following safety procedures, using equipment and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) correctly, and reporting any hazards identified.

Self-Employed Responsibilities

Self-employed individuals are responsible for ensuring their own safety and the safety of others, including the general public when working at height.
They must be aware of and comply with their legal responsibilities, hold required working at height qualifications to comply with safety regulations, have insurance, and meet safety regulations.

Legal Requirements Overview

The following working at height legislations, standards, and guidance that organisations in the UK need to know to ensure the safety and protection of employees, and members of the public.

Health & Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
Aims to protect people from the risk of injury or ill health by

- Ensuring employees' health, safety, and welfare at work
- Protecting non-employees against the health and safety risks arising from work activities

Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992
Enforced by the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 197, this regulation provides more detail on these duties and outlines the minimum safety requirements for UK workplaces.
It cover a wide range of basic health, safety and welfare issues with the exception of:

- Workplaces involving construction work on construction sites
- Workplaces in or on a ship
- Working below ground such as a coal mine

Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992 (PPER)
Places a duty on every employer in the UK to ensure that suitable PPE is provided to employees who may be exposed to a risk to their health or safety while at work.

Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER)
These Regulations place duties on organisations who own, operate or have control over work equipment, including any machinery, appliance, apparatus or tools or for use at work (whether exclusively or not), and whose employees use work equipment, whether owned by them or not.

Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
Legislation describe how an employer should identify the risks that employees, contractors, and members of the public may face and take steps to control or mitigate those risks through a formal risk assessment process.

Work at Height Regulations 2005
Work in any environment where a person could fall a distance and likely to cause personal injury if there were no precautions in place. Common causes are falls from ladders and through fragile roofs. This regulation aims to prevent injury or death from a fall from height.

Construction Design and Management (CDM) Regulations 2007
First introduced in the United Kingdom in 1994 the CDM regulations define the legal duties and responsibilities for the safe design, management, and execution of construction projects in the UK, with the aim of reducing injuries, fatalities, and other health and safety incidents in the construction industry.
CDM 2007 has since been superseded by the:

Construction Design and Management (CDM) Regulations 2015

Superseding CDM 2007 the changes in CDM 2015 are substantial.
Under these regulations, the client, typically the person or business for whom the construction work is being carried out now holds major responsibilities for the health, safety, and welfare aspects of the construction project.

Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007

In the UK, a corporation is recognised by law as a fictitious person (juristic person) that can be capable of committing, being convicted of and sentenced for, a criminal offence.

- The offense causes a person's death
- The offense amounts to a gross breach of a relevant duty of care owed by the organisation to the deceased.

Prior to the 2007 Act, a company could only be found guilty of manslaughter if one employee committed all the parts of the crime. That employee also had to be senior enough to be seen as representing the "mind" or decision-making of the company.

BS EN 365:2004 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Against Falls from a Height

Specifies the minimum requirements for instructions on the use, maintenance, and periodic examination of PPE.
It covers the requirements for repairing, marking, and packaging of PPE including body holding devices and other equipment used together with a body holding device.
The purpose of this equipment is to:

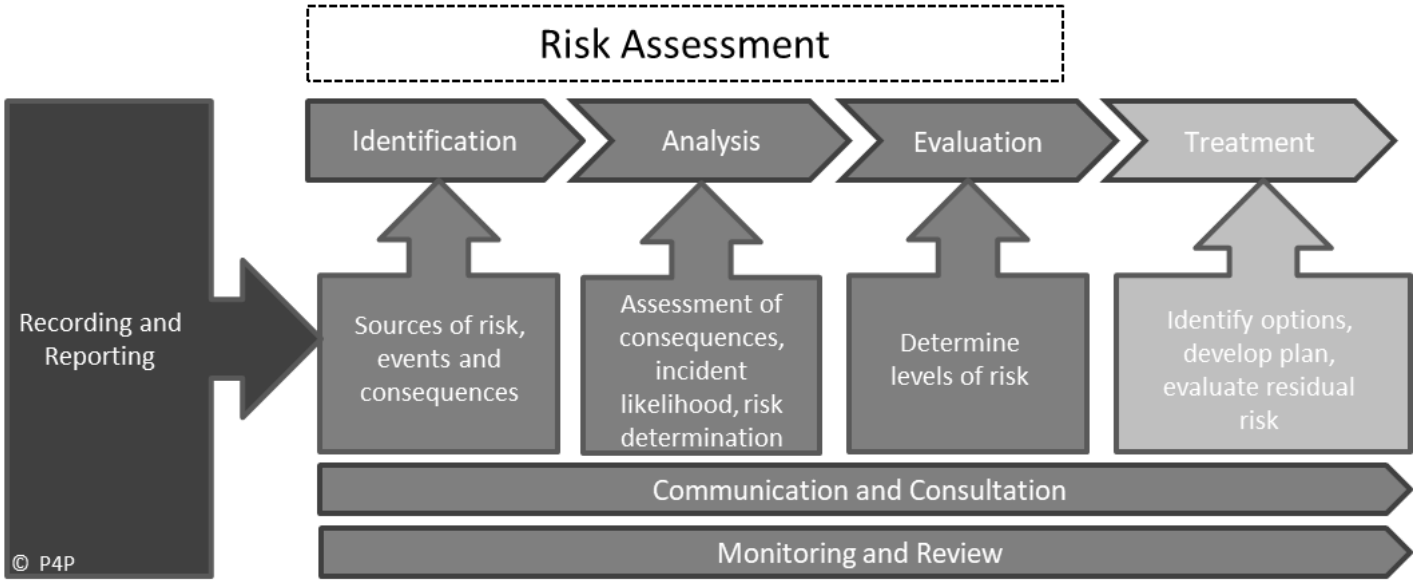
- Stop people from falling
- Provides access and a way to get out
- Position workers so they can do their job safely
- Stops falls from happening
- Allows for rescue if someone does fall

Managing Work at Height

Over 60% of deaths during work at height involve falls:

- From ladders, scaffolds, working platforms and roof edges
- Through fragile roofs or rooflights

The law requires that employers and self-employed contractors conduct a risk assessment, organise and plan the work for work at height to ensure it is carried out safely.



Risk Assessments

Risk assessments are used for evaluating hazards and risks associated with working at height.

As an employer, you must ensure a valid risk assessment is carried out prior to any tasks carried out by your employees when working at height. Therefore, before you begin any working at height, assess the risks related to the height, duration, frequency, and surface condition.

They can help you:

- Assess and identify risks and hazards
- Decide on the necessary precautions
- Record your findings easily and effectively
- Detail any risks and hazards and the relevant control procedures
- Issue clear method statements for everyone who will work at height
- Review and implement changes based on your findings

Work on Roofs

All work undertaken on roofs is highly dangerous, even if the task is of a relatively short duration. Appropriate safeguards must be implemented to effectively mitigate the associated risks.
Individuals tasked with carrying out the work must be suitably trained, competent, and instructed in the proper use of the required precautions.

A detailed "method statement" is the commonly accepted approach to help manage roof work and effectively communicate the precautions to those involved.
When conducting operations on business premises, contractors must collaborate closely with the client to establish and agree upon the arrangements for the safe management of the work.

Key issues:

- Safe access to roofs
- Roof edges and openings
- Fragile surfaces

Common methods for safe roof access include general access scaffolds, stair towers, fixed or mobile scaffold towers, mobile access equipment, ladders, and roof access hatches.

Falls from roof edges are a significant safety concern in both commercial and domestic construction projects, resulting in numerous deaths annually.
For projects involving sloping roofs, proper safety measures are crucial, including the use of scaffolding and edge protection at the eaves to prevent people or materials falling from the place of work.
Falls from flat roof edges can be prevented by simple edge protection, such as a secure double guardrail or roofing toe-board.

All roofs should be treated as fragile until a competent person confirms they are non-fragile.

Fragile surfaces and materials such as:

- Fibre-cement sheets
- Rooflights,
- Wired and non-wired glass
- Rotted chipboard
- Wood wool slabs, slates and tiles

Cannot safely support the weight of a person and any materials they may be carrying.

The law says that contractors and employers must manage the risk of working on or near fragile surfaces by implementing appropriate and adequate safety measures.

HSG/33 Health and Safety in Roof Work publication gives advice on how to plan and work safely on roofs. It covers new buildings, repairs, maintenance, cleaning, and demolition.

Scaffolds

Appropriate precautions must be implemented to mitigate the risk of falls. Providing general access scaffolds offers a viable means of working at height while preventing falls and should be provided whenever practicable.

All scaffolding work must be carried out safely, following industry safety guidance such as NASC SG4 or by following guidance recommendations provided by the scaffolding manufacturer.
The priority and primary goal is to implement collective fall protection measures that minimise the time workers are exposed to fall risks, and the reliance for personal fall protection equipment such as safety harnesses.

Scaffold Inspection
It is the responsibility of the scaffold user(s) and or hirers to ensure that all scaffolding has been inspected:

- After installation and before first use
- At least every 7 days thereafter
- Following any circumstances that could compromise safety of the installation such as high winds and storms

Inspections must be carried out by a competent person with appropriate knowledge, training, and experience for the scaffold type and complexity. This may include CISRS certification or training from the scaffold manufacturer/supplier.

The inspection report must document any defects, safety risks, and corrective actions taken, even if addressed promptly, to help identify recurring issues.

Safety Nets

If the risk of a fall cannot be eliminated, safety nets that absorbs energy can help to mitigate the consequences and distance should a fall occur.

When a person falls into a net, the material deforms as it absorbs the load, therefore it is essential to provide adequate clearance below the net to allow deformation to occur without the person striking the ground or another object.
The safety net system should only be installed (rigged), maintained, changed, and removed (de-rigged) by trained and competent people.

Safety Net Inspection

It is the responsibility of the safety net user(s) and or hirers to ensure that all safety nets are:

- Inspected by a competent person, usually the manufacturer
- After installation and a handover certificate prepared to confirm their safety
- On a weekly basis to ensure they are still fixed correctly and will arrest a fall

Safety Net Risk Assessment

Should include:

- Procedures for providing first aid while the person is still in the net
- Procedures for rescuing someone from a trapped net

Soft-Landing Systems

On-site inflatable bags or manufacturers pre-filled units containing small polystyrene pieces or air pockets, can be positioned directly below workers, filling any void to reduce the distance of the fall, minimising injuries and their severity.

The installation, maintenance, modification, and removal of any soft-landing system is critical and must only be undertaken by trained and competent people working to manufacturers' instructions.

Soft-Landing System Inspection

It is the responsibility of the Soft-Landing System user(s) and or hirers to ensure that all Soft-Landing System:

- Is inspected by a competent person, usually the manufacturer after installation and a handover certificate prepared to confirm it has been correctly assembled and positioned
- On a weekly basis to ensure the system remains safe for use as a fall arrest mechanism

Conclusion

In the UK, falls from heights are the main cause of deaths and serious injuries at work.

The Work at Height Regulations 2005 aim to prevent fatalities and injuries resulting from falls from heights.

If you are an employer or have control over work performed at height, such as facilities managers or building owners who may contract others to carry out work at height), these Regulations are applicable to you.

When performing tasks or activities at height, such as working on a ladder, scaffold, or rooftop, it is crucial to take the following precautions to ensure safety and to prevent accidents, injuries and fatalities:

1. Only allow competent workers, with the right skills, knowledge, and experience to work at height
2. Use appropriate PPE such as properly fitted safety harness, hard hat, and non-slip footwear to minimise the risk of falls and injuries
3. Inspect equipment before use, carefully examine the condition of any ladders, scaffolds, or other elevated platforms to ensure they are in good working order and can safely support the required weight
4. Secure the work area by cordoning off the designated work area using barriers or warning signs to prevent unauthorised access and minimise the risk of objects accidentally falling on people below
5. Avoid working alone and whenever possible work with a partner or team to assist in an emergency
6. When climbing or working on an elevated surface, the best practice is to use the three points of contact system at all times with the structure system. This means having two hands and one foot or two feet and one hand, firmly in place as you navigate the elevated surface to maintain stability
7. Be aware of your surroundings and continuously monitor the work area for potential hazards, such as overhead power lines, uneven surfaces, or adverse weather conditions.
8. Follow all safety protocols and training specific to your workplace or task when working at heights. Adhere to established procedures and ensure you have received the necessary training to work safely at elevated locations.

By following these key best practices, you can enhance the safety and reduce the risk of incidents when working at height.

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