

Working at Height

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Introduction

Welcome to our working at height page, did you know that falls from heights are a common cause of fatal and serious injuries at work. 124 workers lost their life in 2024/25, with over a quarter of those as a result of a fall from height in the workplace and 1000's more were injured.

The Work at Height Regulations 2005 were introduced to help prevent these deaths and injuries and apply to any work where a person could be hurt by falling from a height. They set out a simple hierarchy for managing and selecting equipment for work at height:

- Avoid work at height where this is practicable.
- Use work equipment or other measures to prevent falls where work at height cannot be avoided.
- Where the risk of a fall cannot be eliminated, use work equipment or other measures to minimise the distance and consequences of a fall should one occur.

Please Note - The regulations apply to **ANY** work above ground level or where an individual could fall into something i.e. an excavation. There is **NO** minimum height or depth a person could fall before the regulations apply. If someone can fall, the regulations apply.

The main requirements of the Work at Height Regulations (WAHR) are to organise and plan work at height, ensure competence of all involved, ensure risk avoidance, appropriate selection of work equipment and appropriate inspection of work equipment used for work at height.

Managers must identify work at height where there is a risk of personal injury from a fall and ensure that appropriate precautions are implemented to control the risk.



Non-routine work such as cleaning, repair and maintenance should be considered as well as routine work. Workers should receive suitable instructions and training so they understand the precautions that need to be taken.

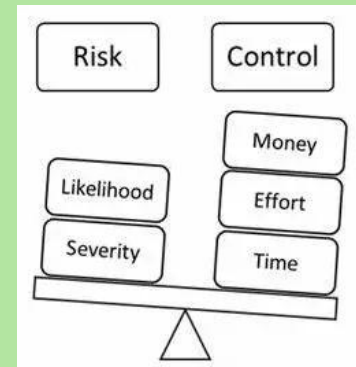
For further guidance on the specific role and responsibilities please see the Working at Height - Roles and Responsibilities section.

HIERARCHY OF MEASURES TO REDUCE RISKS

Each level of the hierarchy set below is qualified by 'so far as is reasonably practicable' it must be demonstrated that it was not reasonably practicable to adopt a work method higher up the hierarchy than the precaution adopted or proposed to be adopted for work at height activities.

The risk assessment should identify all work carried out at height, including work that is intermittent, incidental or ancillary to the main activity. Peripatetic work and the 'odd job person' should not be forgotten. The risk assessment should indicate how these jobs are carried out and what equipment is used.

In recently built buildings, the CDM Health and Safety file (which should give information on safe maintenance) should be available.



It is frequently the case that work at height is carried out by unsupervised workers and therefore it is important that the risk assessment should lead to identification of training needs e.g. in safe erection, inspection, use and dismantling of equipment.

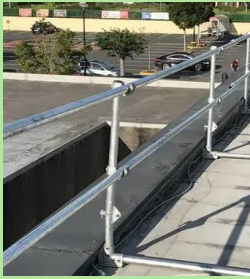
When organising and planning work at height, it is also necessary to identify the precautions in case of emergency and/or rescue. Reasonably foreseeable situations should be considered, such as stuck Mobile Elevated Work Platforms (MEWPs) or deployed fall arrest equipment, and a plan for emergencies and/or rescue should be devised. Reliance on the emergency services is not acceptable.

Contingency plans should be in place to postpone work at height when adverse weather conditions such as high wind speed could jeopardise the health and safety of workers.

The Hierarchy of Control Measures

- 1. Avoid working at height** - Long handled tools can be utilised from ground level thereby removing the need to work at height. If avoidance is not reasonably practicable, the next stage of the hierarchy, "fall prevention", should be considered.





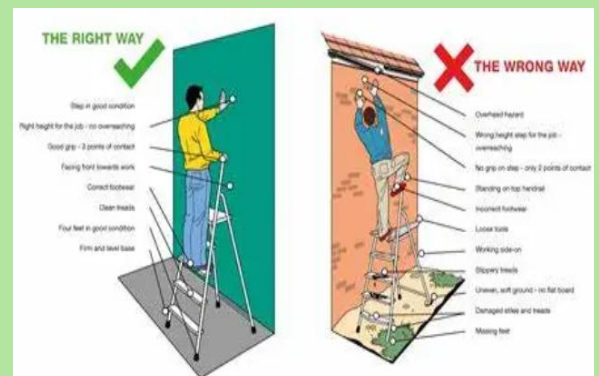
2. **Preventing falls** - This could be, for example, a flat roof with a permanently installed parapet or guardrail around the peripheral edges. If such a place cannot be utilised or created, then it will be necessary to utilise work equipment to prevent falls.

3. **Prevent falls-** Utilising suitable work equipment This includes the use of temporary guardrails and other work equipment which ensures fall prevention e.g. scaffolds, tower scaffolds, MEWP's etc.



4. **Mitigate the effects of a fall** - If fall prevention is not reasonably practicable or the measures above do not eliminate the risk of a fall occurring, then the next stage of the hierarchy is to mitigate the effects of a fall. Equipment such as nets, airbags, fall arrest systems etc minimise the distance and/or consequences of a fall.

5. **Provide equipment and training to reduce the likelihood of falls** - If it is not reasonably practicable to prevent or mitigate the effects of a fall, it is necessary to provide equipment and training to reduce the likelihood of falls occurring. Using ladders and stepladders can be justified at the bottom of the hierarchy, providing the user has been trained and instructed in the selection and safe use of ladders/stepladders and systems are in place to ensure they are maintained and inspected.



Ladders do not prevent or mitigate falls but if used by trained persons in appropriate circumstances, their use can be justified.

The bottom of the hierarchy can be used to justify safe systems of work and other precautions that constitute other suitable and sufficient measures, such as installing lighting on an edge when it is not reasonably practicable to provide guard rails or providing high visibility painted lines to designate inspection pits etc.

Roles and Responsibilities

This section covers the different levels of responsibility for various levels within an organisation. This is an example of how roles and responsibilities may be assigned within a policy relating to working at height. It details examples of specific requirements and what duties may be allocated to employees, depending on the roles they are employed in, specific to any working at height operation either they or their employees are engaged in.

Executive and Assistant Directors *(Headteachers and Governors – in a school setting)*

Responsible for ensuring that effective arrangements are in place in their Directorates/School to prevent injuries from falls from height and comply with the requirements of the Work at Height Regulations.

Making their employees aware of the policy and its application within their directorate.

Monitoring, enforcing and promoting the process.

Gaining assurance from their management team that the process is being implemented.

Dealing with breaches of the policy quickly and effectively.

Team Leaders and Line Managers *(Year/subject leads/heads in a school setting)*

Are responsible for:

- Carrying out and recording risk assessments that include (where relevant) any work at height to ensure it's properly planned and organised.
- Ensure Implementation of suitable measures that a line with the hierarchy of controls to minimize risk.
- Ensure those involved in work at height are trained and competent
- Ensure equipment for work at height is appropriately inspected and maintained
- Ensure the risks from fragile surfaces are properly controlled; and the risks from falling objects are properly controlled
- Ensure all outside work at height takes account of weather conditions that could endanger health and safety
- Ensure incidents/injuries/near misses related to working at height are recorded on the AIR system
- If required, undertake a Managers Investigation Action Tracker (MAIT) form.
- Gain assurance and confirmation that all equipment used in relation to working at height is maintained, tested, inspected and certified as per the requirement of Lifting Equipment, Lifting Operations Regulations (LOLER)

Employees

Duties include:

- Carrying out pre-use checks on access equipment before use and reporting faulty equipment to their manager.
- Completing any relevant working at height training as identified within relevant risk assessments
- Read any risk assessment, user guidance, manuals, procedures, etc related to working at height, reporting any issues, problems or mis-understandings to their line manager
- Using access equipment properly in accordance with the training and instructions received.

- Seeking further instructions where the work at height cannot be carried out safely with the equipment available.
- Reporting any defects, damage to any equipment related to reducing/controlling the risk associated with working at height ASAP
- Report any accident, injuries or near miss incidents associated to working at height operations ASAP via the Accident Incident Reporting (AIR) form incident reporting system.
- Report/inform their line manager ASAP of any medical conditions or medication being taken which could either affect or prevent them from working from height safely.

Competent Health and Safety Support *(may be contracted in within a school setting)*

- Will be responsible for maintaining, reviewing and updating the Working at Height guidance pages and related guidance, systems and documentation.
- Will provide advice and guidance to manager and employees in relation to Working at Height Regulations, the HUB page etc.
- Review and evaluate the accident stats, reporting back any trends or patterns to management.

Training, Guidance, Checks and Inspections

On this page we cover the training requirements and what training is available the schools Lincs2Learn dashboard. It also includes guidance and advice of working at height safely, including ladder and step ladder safety, check lists, inspection and records.

Training - Lincs2Learn

For employees who undertake simple/general working at height operations, for example using step ladders, normal ladders, small steps etc. The *Working at Height* course on schools Lincs2Learn dashboard is recommended as a minimum. Click [here](#) to access the course.

However, some operations may require specific or specialised training, which should be identified within the relevant operational risk assessment, i.e. scaffold inspection, operating mobile working platforms, tower scaffold erection, etc.

Specialised/Specific Training

Your risk assessment may have identified specific control measures that require the employees to undertake specific/bespoke training that goes beyond the basics covered within our standard Lincs2Learn course.

If employees are expected to use equipment like mobile working platform (MWP's) or will need to wear a harness/fall arrest system it very likely that specific training on the safe use/operation, checking and maintenance of this equipment will be required.



The details of what the training requirement are i.e. what course(s), by what provider, who requires it, and the frequency will all need to be outlined within the relevant operational risk assessment. Advice and guidance on what specific training is required may be sourced from various parties i.e. the supplier of the equipment, competent training providers and the Corporate Health and Safety Team.

What training is required may differ for each operation depending on the task being undertaken, the equipment being used, the individuals involved, the environmental factors, etc. So, it's important all relevant risk assessments are reviewed and updated as required to ensure they are suitable and sufficient.

Fragile Roofs

Fragile roofing materials may fracture without warning. Fractures can occur so rapidly that a worker could easily fall through the roof, suffering serious or even fatal injuries. All roofs should be treated as fragile until a competent person has confirmed they are not. No sheeted roof should be relied on to bear a person's weight.



Items falling from height

It's important to also consider within your working at height risk assessment any risk posed from items falling from height and striking people below. Control measures that you may have to implement or consider include:

- Toe boards on scaffolding (this is a legal requirement)
- Tools being attached to the employee by cords
- Enclosed scaffolding
- Signage
- Hard hats



Ladder and Step Ladders

First things first, the use of ladders and step ladders is NOT banned by the Working at Height Regulations. They can be a useful tool and ideal for short duration working at height tasks/operations. What is required is a sensible, proportionate approach to managing risk, and ladders can be a sensible and practical option for low-risk, short-duration tasks and although they should not automatically be your first choice, there is no reason why they cannot be used, if suitably risk assessed.

With the implementation of some simple and sensible precautions you should ensure you stay safe when using portable leaning ladders and stepladders.

Top Ladder & Step Ladder Safety Tips

Only use them for short duration work (maximum 30 minutes) light work (up to 10 kg).



Do a daily pre-use check on the ladder, do not use equipment with defects, and check the ladder is:

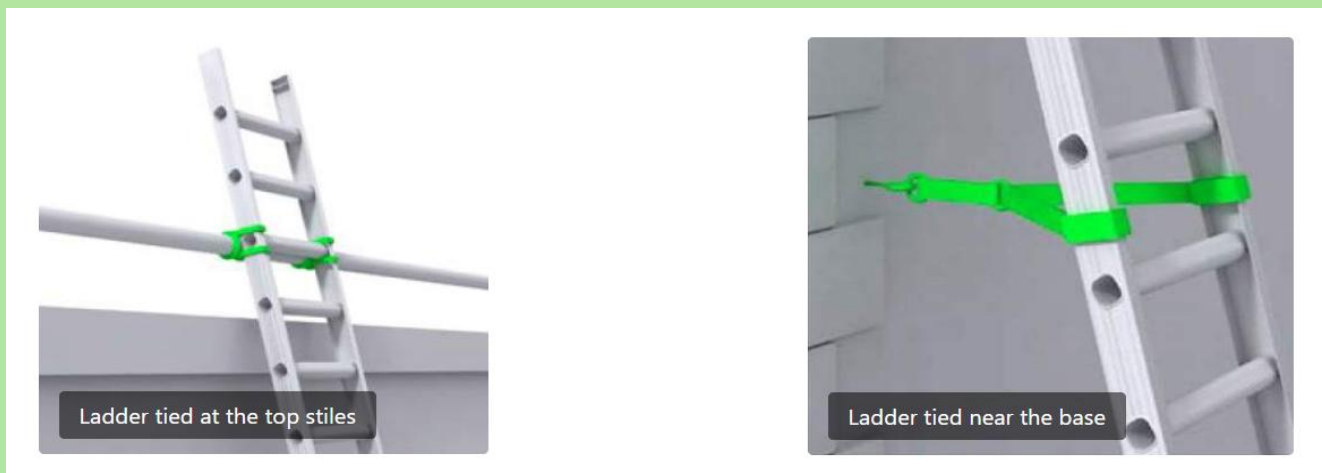
- suitable for the planned work
- has no visible defects to the feet, stiles, rungs
- subject to regular and recorded detailed inspections



Please note: *BS Class 1 or EN 131 ladders should be used at work unless they are used only occasionally for light work, in these situations domestic BS Class 3 may be suitable providing the maximum load is less than 95kg and careful pre-use checks are carried out.*

For further details on ladder and step ladder inspections see the section below.

Ensure the ladder is secured at the top and bottom, where possible, see examples below.



Ground should be firm and level, if not, a re-assessment of whether ladders are suitable for the planned work should be undertaken. For mild slopes i.e. 16 degrees or less a suitable levelling device may be used, but only after a risk assessment is undertaken. Use any locking devices.



Avoid side-on working or get someone to support the stepladder from the side.

Do NOT stand on the top step of a step ladder

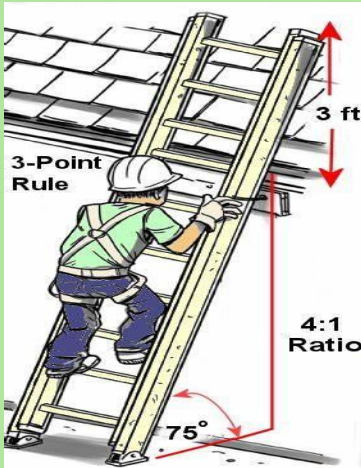




Have a strong upper resting point i.e. a suitable stand-off, not plastic guttering.

Floors should be clean, not slippery.

Do not work off the top three rungs of a ladder– these provide handholds.



Set the ladder angle using the 1 in 4 rule (1 unit out for every 4 units up)



Do not overreach - make sure your belt buckle (navel) stays within the stiles and keep both feet on the same rung or step throughout the task.



Always grip the ladder when climbing and working, the 3 point rule.

Inspection of ladders and step ladders

Detailed visual inspections

These checks should be carried out in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and recorded on a suitable form.

Top 5 checks:

1. **Ensure your ladders and stepladders are suitable for work use. BS Class 1 or EN 131 ladders or stepladders should be used at work unless they are used only occasionally for light work.**

In these situations, domestic (BS Class 3) may be suitable providing the maximum load placed on them is less than 95kg and careful pre-use checks are carried out.

2. **Feet are in good repair, clean and not loose, missing, or excessively worn.**



3. Stiles are not cracked, broken or splintered



4. Rungs/steps are not cracked, broken or splintered



5. Hinges, braces and cords are in good condition



Pre-Use Checks

These checks should be carried out before using ladders and stepladders. Only use equipment that:

Has no visible defects to the feet, stiles, rungs/steps, hinges, braces and cords

Is subject to regular and recorded detailed inspections in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions

Is suitable for work use, see above.

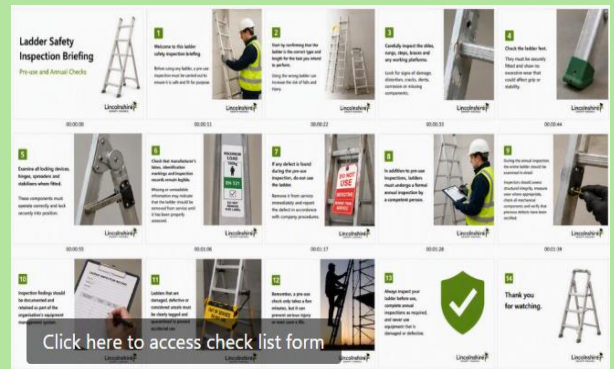
Ladder feet should also be checked when moving from soft/dirty ground (e.g. dug soil, loose sand/stone, a dirty workshop) to a smooth, solid surface (e.g. paving slabs), to ensure the foot material and not the dirt (e.g. soil, embedded stones) is making contact with the ground. Pre-use checks should be part of a user's ladder/stepladder training.



Pre-use Checks and Annual Inspection Form

There is a requirement to record any pre-sue checks and annual inspections completed on ladders and step ladders, all sets of ladders should be assigned an asset number which will identify the ladder on any records and show what checks/inspections have been carried out and when.

This new interactive checklist can be used to record these checks and inspections – **Click Image to access.**



Equipment should be fitted with a simple inspection tag or sticker which contain simple information about the equipment i.e. a unique ID number, date of last inspection, date of next inspection. You should also have a master document that contains a full list of all your equipment and their unique ID numbers.