

## WORKING AT HEIGHTS

Falling from heights is a common cause of injury and death in workplaces. Workers have been injured and killed falling from portable and fixed ladders, roofs, scaffolding, mezzanine floors, platforms and elevated walkways.

### **Most accidents that occur when working at heights can be prevented by:**

- Thorough identification of all of the risks associated with the job.
- Assessing and controlling the risks before work commences.
- Ensuring safe access and protection from falls.
- Using the right equipment for the job and making sure it is correctly assembled and maintained.
- Good housekeeping, keeping the work area tidy and clear of obstacles.

Regulations require employers to identify all physical locations and tasks that might cause an employee or contractor to fall more than 2 metres. Where a task involving a fall hazard is identified, the employer must assess the risk of a fall occurring and put in place measures to control the risk.

### **Where possible the risk should be eliminated, but if this is not possible, the risk must be reduced considering these controls:**

- Undertake the work on the ground or a solid construction where this is possible.
- Undertake the work using a passive fall prevention device for example a temporary work platform or scaffold.
- Undertake the work using a fall injury prevention system for example an elevating work platform such as a scissor lift or cherry picker.

Not all work at heights will involve a fall hazard of more than 2 metres. But a fall from less than 2 metres can still cause serious injury.

It is therefore suggested that even work at heights below 2 metres should be assessed for the risk of a fall occurring and the risks should have appropriate controls put in place to minimise the risk of injury.

### **When ladders are needed, it is important to:**

- Choose the correct ladder for the job.
- Do not use metal ladders near electricity or power lines.
- Check the ladder is well maintained eg for damaged rungs or cracks.
- Cordon off the area if there are pedestrians or traffic nearby.
- Secure the head and base of the ladder – or ensure that someone is holding the base.
- Lock the spreaders on a step ladder into position.
- Make sure your footwear is suitable for climbing the ladder.
- Use both hands to climb the ladder – tools can be passed up or carried in a belt.
- Make sure the stiles of the ladder extend at least 900 mm above the stepping off point and that there is a safe place to stand when stepping off the ladder.



**Where scaffolding is used, it is important that:**

- It conforms to all regulations and standards in its construction and installation.
- If it is a mobile-type scaffold, that the wheels are locked prior to use.
- It is fitted with toe boards and hand rails and mid rails.
- Work platforms are level and kept clear of obstructions.
- Correct footwear is worn.

**If working on roofs, it is important to ensure that work can be done safely by:**

- Using fall protection systems such as safety mesh, safety nets, guardrails, or individual fall arrest systems, eg safety harnesses.
- Using safe access to the work area for yourself and your tools and equipment.
- Not working on fragile or asbestos cement roofs until a thorough risk assessment has been completed and safe work procedures put in place.
- Wearing suitable anti-slip footwear.

**Answers:**

1. Can you name three ways to prevent accidents involving falls from heights?

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2. Can you describe three things that should be done when we need to use ladders?

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3. When using scaffold what are three important things to check?

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4. Can you name two things that will prevent falls when working on roofs?

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5. What should be done before working on a roof which could be fragile?

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