**Work at Height Guidance**

**February 2022**

**Definition and Introduction**

Working at heights is defined as work where a fall could lead to injury under the Work at Height (WAH) Regulations 2005. It is not defined by the height at which the task is undertaken. Injury could be caused by falling a short distance e.g. from a 4-step kick stool or the more obvious long ladder or from cherry pickers or scaffolding. The government has produced guidance on Working at Height and using ladders and stepladders safely.

Under the regulations the employer has a duty to protect the staff and ensure that all equipment used is fit for purpose and suitable for the task e.g. provide ladders that are intact and able to support the load.

Employees have a duty to use the correct equipment in a safe manner and not to put themselves or others at risk e.g. not using ladders that have broken or twisted rungs. They should also use tower scaffolds if the work is likely to take more than a few minutes and people would not be able to maintain three points of contact with the ladder.

In some cases such as changing a light which requires both hands, [the body can be a point of contact when leaning against a ladder](https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/faq-height.htm). This should only be for a brief period.

The [HSE](https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/faq-height.htm) defines short duration work as tasks that are measured in minutes rather than hours. However a judgement must be made in terms of how long the person will be at the top of the ladder.

The use of ladders or stepladders is not banned under the WAH regulations, but employers and employees must take a reasonable approach to the selection of equipment and undertaking the task as falls from height still cause a large number of injuries amongst workers.

Working at height can involve kick stools, step ladders and long ladders. It is advisable not to stand on desks to reach items.

**Control Measures**

In order to prevent people from being hurt due to falls, appropriate control measures must be selected. It is the duty of the employer to make sure that working at height is as safe as possible. It is the duty of the employee to follow the working at height rules at all times and report to their line manager if the work cannot be undertaken safely.

Injuries and deaths have occurred due to [falls](https://www.shponline.co.uk/tag/work-at-height-regulations-2005/) while working at height. Injuries can occur from low level falls e.g. from desks.

A control measure is something that is designed to reduce the risk that a task poses to individuals who are undertaking the task or others who are nearby.

These are split into

1. *Engineering controls*

This involves checking that equipment is appropriate for a task e.g. if the task is low risk e.g. changing a filter that is only 30 cm above head height then a kick stool or step ladder could be used providing that the work allows three points of contact with the ladder at all times.

If the task involves changing items that are 2 or 3 metres above the ground, then a long ladder would be selected rather than standing on tip toe on the top of a step ladder. A second person must be present to foot or stabilise the ladder.

If the work would involve being close to the top of a long ladder, a tower scaffold would be more appropriate.

Engineering controls include the use of fully serviceable ladders, that do not have missing or corroded rungs or attachments to the top of the step ladder or the ladder catch mechanism.

2. *Behavioural controls*

This involves being trained to use a ladder and selecting the appropriate ladder for the task e.g. using the correct step ladder or a long ladder.

Undertaking ladder or stepladder inspection at the required frequency (please see frequency section). The ladder, stepladder or kick-stool must be positioned on suitable dry level flooring.

Reading the risk assessment for a task prior to starting work. Simple tasks such as descending from 4 rung stepladders that have been used to place items on shelves have led to people having injuries and time off work.

A second person must assist in holding / footing the ladder.

Three points of contact must be maintained when using a ladder. This means both feet and one hand is in contact with the ladder. Many activities may require both hands to be off the ladder and this would be unsafe. If activities require both hands to be off the ladder a tower scaffold should be used especially if a fall from the ladder could lead to serious injury. People have been injured after falling only 1M and required surgery.

A ladder that appears to be vibrating when ascending it, must not be used.

**Ladder Inspection Frequency**

A once day pre-use check of the ladder will be in line with the policy and guidance.

A formal ladder inspection will be undertaken once every 6 months for all working at height equipment \*. This should be undertaken by the Estates Depatrment.

Extra checks will be made on the ladders that are used in areas where there is high humidity to check for corrosion.

People must be reminded that even short ladders can be dangerous and even minor defects must be reported.

\*Note With daily pre-use inspections, it is unlikely that defects will not be spotted.

**Working at Height Ladder Checklist**

This should be completed prior using the ladder.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Item | Date | Ready for use | Requires repair |
|  | | | |
| Check the stiles – these should not be bent or twisted |  |  |  |
|  | | | |
| Check the feet |  |  |  |
|  | | | |
| Check the rungs – these should not be cracked, worn, bent or loose |  |  |  |
|  | | | |
| Check any locking mechanisms - cracked or damaged welded joints, loose rivets or damaged stays |  |  |  |
|  | | | |
| Check the stepladder platform |  |  |  |
|  | | | |
| Check the steps or treads on stepladders |  |  |  |
|  | | | |

**Location and use checklist for long ladders and Step ladders**.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Item | Date | Yes | No |
|  | | | |
| Floor is solid |  |  |  |
|  | | | |
| Floor is free of water |  |  |  |
|  | | | |
| Is the wall the ladder being leant against smooth without loose bricks |  |  |  |
|  | | | |
| Ladder can be securely footed |  |  |  |
|  | | | |
| Ladder is positioned close to the item being looked at |  |  |  |
|  | | | |
| Ladder is not obstructing doors |  |  |  |
|  | | | |
| The top of the long ladder will extend either 1M or 3 rungs above the top of the work area |  |  |  |
|  | | | |
| Individuals will not stand on the very top 3 rungs of a long ladder |  |  |  |
|  | | | |
| The top of the step ladder will be kept clear of unnecessary items |  |  |  |
|  | | | |
| The top step of the stepladder will only be used if the stepladder has a handhold |  |  |  |
|  | | | |
| Three points of contact will be maintained at all times |  |  |  |
|  | | | |
| Descents will be managed with care and steps or rungs will not be missed out |  |  |  |
|  | | | |
| Work involving the Stepladder or Ladder will not involving sideways leaning. |  |  |  |
|  | | | |

Further Information

Further Information is available at these links

HSE Work at Height [micro-site](https://www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/)

HSE Working at Height [FAQ](https://www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/faqs.htm#work-at-height)

Percentage of injuries caused by [working at height](https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causinj/index.htm)