

# Work at height and falls



Common causes of working at height fatalities and major injuries include falls from ladders and falls through fragile surfaces, but there are other causes, such as falls from vehicles and being hit by an object falling from height.

There is no minimum height requirement under the [Work at Height Regulations](#). A place is 'at height' where a person could be injured falling from it, even if it is at or below ground level and so tasks at height can include anything from filing on high shelves using a small step ladder, to cleaning high windows on an elevated platform.

### Key actions to prevent falls from height

- Understand the requirements of the Work at Height Regulations and what your duties are under them, particularly if you are an employer.
  - Where you're having work carried out by a contractor, ensure all necessary safety measures are in place before work starts.
- All methods to complete a task must be investigated so working at height can be avoided, if possible.
- Conduct a thorough risk assessment for each and every task involving work at height.
- Properly plan, organise, and appropriately supervise the work thoroughly and ensure it is carried out in a safe manner.
- Ensure those involved in the work (including the planning, organising, supervising, and carrying out of the work) are competent – meaning they have the skills, knowledge, and experience to do the job, or are supervised by a competent person if they are being trained.
- Make sure the working area is safe and, so far as is possible, includes features to prevent a fall (such as a railing or barrier).
- Provide suitable risk control measures, such as a safe place of work or a means of access designed to prevent a fall.
- Supply suitable equipment to prevent falls where a safe place of work or means of access isn't possible, as well as appropriate equipment for the work involved. Ensure that the equipment, including safety devices, is used correctly and whenever necessary.

- When choosing equipment, choose collective systems which protect everything (such as a physical barrier, guard rail, or working platform), above personal systems which protect the individual (such as a harness).
- Ladders and stepladders may be used for work at height, but only for work that is not heavy or strenuous, provided the risk assessment shows it is low risk, it is for a short duration (up to 30 minutes in one position) and it can be used safely.
  - Ladders and stepladders must be secured in place, where practical, by tying both stiles to a suitable point. When you can't, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) advises using a ladder with an effective ladder stability device, such as outriggers. If this isn't possible either, the ladder should be securely wedged against a wall for example. As a last resort, the ladder should be footed by someone else – but only if none of the above can be achieved.
- Where a risk of falling remains, use work equipment, training and other measures to minimise the distance and consequence of any fall as much as possible.
- Inspect and maintain work and safety equipment as appropriate and the place of work at height each time it's to be used.
- Make workers aware they must report any safety hazards (e.g. unassessed activities or equipment defects) to their employer.
- Except for emergency service workers acting in an emergency, only allow work at height when weather conditions mean it safe to do so.
- Create a plan for dealing with emergencies and for rescues.