

SECTION 3(10a)

WORK AT HEIGHT

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Introduction

This guide will help you to comply with the [Work at Height Regulations 2005](#) (WAHR). Falls from height are one of the biggest causes of workplace fatalities and major injuries. Common causes are falls from ladders and through fragile roofs. The purpose of WAHR is to prevent death and injury from a fall from height.

Work at height means work in any place where, if there were no precautions in place, a person could fall a distance liable to cause personal injury. For example you are working at height if you:

- are working on a ladder or a flat roof;
- could fall through a fragile surface;
- could fall into an opening in a floor or a hole in the ground.

Take a sensible approach when considering precautions for work at height. There may be some low-risk situations where common sense tells you no particular precautions are necessary and the law recognises this.

What you must do

The WAHR aim to prevent deaths and injuries caused each year by falls at work. They apply to all work at height where it is likely someone will be injured if they fall. The regulations set out three simple rules for work at height:

- **AVOID** work at height if you can - If you don't need to go up there, don't!!
- If work at height cannot be avoided **PREVENT** falls by selecting and using the right access equipment
- **MINIMISE** the impact of any fall. Where you cannot eliminate the risk of a fall, use work equipment or other means to minimise the distance and consequences of a fall, should one occur

Each point should be considered in the order shown.

You should only be considering types of access equipment once you have decided that work at height is unavoidable.

Any work at height **MUST**;

- Be kept to a minimum
- Be properly planned
- Be appropriately supervised
- Be carried out by someone who is trained and competent and able to complete the task safely and erect/use/dismantle or operate as appropriate the selected access equipment.

If you are going to work at height you should be trained and competent, and be able to;

- complete the task safely
- erect/use/dismantle or operate as appropriate the selected access equipment

If you are still being trained you should be supervised by a fully trained and competent person.

How to manage the risks

When planning work at height you need to carry out a 'risk assessment'. This should supplement your overall health and safety risk assessment. You don't need to overcomplicate the process. The risks for working at height are usually well known and most necessary control measures are easy to apply.

The law does not expect you to eliminate all risk, but you are required to protect people by minimising risk as far as 'reasonably practicable'. A risk assessment is simply:

- a careful examination of the work at height task to identify hazards and
- a consideration of whether the hazards pose a risk that could cause harm to people.

Workers and others have a right to be protected from harm caused by a failure to take reasonable control measures. You should always consider whether you have taken enough precautions or should do more to prevent harm. If you have to work at height:

- **Use an existing safe place of work to access work at height** - don't cut corners, if there is already a safe means of access such as a permanent stair and guardrailed platform use it!
- **Provide or use work equipment to prevent falls**, such as scaffolding, mobile access towers or mobile elevating work platforms (MEWPs) which have guardrails around the working platform.
- **Minimise** distance and consequences of a fall, for example by using a properly set up stepladder or ladder within its limitations for low level, short duration work only.

For more advice go to:

- [Five Steps to risk assessment](#)
- [Work at height - The basics](#)
- [A brief guide to the Regulations and Managing Risk](#)

Selecting the right access equipment

All access equipment should be used by a competent person in its erection/use/dismantling or operation. If you're still being trained, you should be supervised by someone who is competent to use the access equipment and carry out the task.

Avoid working on fragile roofs

All roof work is dangerous. Roof workers account for 24% of all those who are killed in a fall from height - the biggest category of worker by far. Any fall from a roof will at the very least involve a serious injury. The risks are substantial, however long or short the work. Many have been killed who only meant to be on the roof for a few minutes 'to have a quick look' or to carry out a small repair.

If you intend to work on a roof you need the appropriate knowledge, skills and experience to work safely, or you need to be under the supervision of someone who is competent.

Protection against falls is required whenever anyone works on or near fragile materials. A fragile material is one that does not safely support the weight of a person and any load they are carrying. Suitable protection will normally include a combination of coverings, guard rails, safety nets and safety harnesses. For further information on roof work see: [INDG284](#) and refer to the: [Advisory Committee for Roof work website](#)

Take precautions to prevent unauthorised access to fragile roofs. This will normally involve people at work, but you may also need to consider the likelihood of unauthorised public access, particularly by children. A risk assessment is likely to require signs warning of the hazard and prohibiting access except under controlled conditions, eg permit-to-work system. Figure below illustrates a suitable sign which should be fixed at the approaches to roofs with fragile coverings. Such signs should be durable, securely fastened and properly maintained.



Rope Access techniques

Rope access techniques are a specialist area where you need formal training before it becomes an option. For more information contact [Industrial Rope Access Trade Association International \(IRATA\)](#)

Do not use your equipment in dangerous weather conditions

The WAHR specifically state that work should not be carried out if weather conditions could endanger the health and safety of workers. Work at height should not be carried out in unsuitable weather conditions (e.g. when it is windy, raining heavily or icy) which present a risk for the equipment used and the task.

Always check the surface conditions

Always check that the surface conditions on which your access equipment will stand is level, firm, stable and as appropriate, clean and dry.

Some Work at height examples

Some examples for:

- Changing light bulbs in an office corridor
- Changing light bulbs in an office corridor and
- Installation of CCT Equipment

Can be found at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/wait/selectaccessequipment.htm>

Subcontract safely

Anyone involved in assembling or using access equipment, for example scaffolding or Mobile Elevating Working Platforms (MEWPs) such as scissor lifts, must be trained and competent to do so. This includes any contractors.

For scaffolding and powered access equipment such as MEWPs, in particular, there are widely recognised training schemes providing certificates or licenses to those who have completed general training. It is also important that workers are familiar with the specific equipment in use, particularly with MEWPs as their features can differ considerably between makes and models

What you should consider when you subcontract work to others? You must:

- check the health and safety performance and competence of the people you plan to use for the work.
- give them the health and safety information they need for the work.
- talk about the work (including the access and health and safety aspects) before they start.
- make sure that you have provided everything you agreed (e.g. safe scaffolds, the right plant, access to welfare, etc).
- check their performance and remedy problems with, or deviations from, the planned work.

For more information on selection of contractor see: [Selecting Competent Contractors for Work at Height](#)

Further Information

HSE's website provides more advice, guidance and answers to frequently asked questions. Industries and trade associations have produced guidance about working at height for specific jobs or for using certain types of access equipment. Find out more using following links:

- www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/index.htm
- [BFC Guidance on Safe Use of Ladders](#)
- [Work at Height - A brief guide INDG401](#)
- [Work at Height Information Toolkit](#)
- [Using ladders & stepladders safely](#)
- [Health & Safety in Roof Work](#)
- [Guidance on Risk Assessment](#)
- [Work at Height Regulations 2005](#)
- [Fragile Roofs - Safe working practices](#)