



SME Risk Management Guide

Working at height





Why is this important?

The most common kinds of fatal accidents to workers in 2021/22 continues to be falls from a height. These are also one of the biggest causes of workplace major injuries with common causes being falls from ladders and through fragile roofs.

What do I need to think about?

- Make sure you've identified all areas in your business where there's a risk from falling from height, this could include falls from vehicles or loading bay areas, falls into excavations, as well as risks such as falls from buildings, equipment, ladders or high-level access equipment.
- Can current processes be changed so you no longer need to work at height or the risks associated with it can be reduced?
- Is the task of a light nature and short duration and can it be safely completed from ladders or does other high level access equipment need to be provided? Make sure you complete formal regular checks on all ladders and record them on a ladder register.
- Have working at height risk assessments been tailored to the task and the environment in which tasks are completed? The HSE website provides examples of risk assessments for different environments and a template that can be used to complete your own risk assessments:
[Risk assessment: Template and examples - HSE](#)
- What equipment do I need to provide to allow safe working at height which is suitable, stable and strong enough for the task?
- How are equipment, tools and materials transported to height when needed?
- Are procedures in place to make sure equipment is suitably checked and maintained?
- Are extra precautions when working on or near fragile surfaces needed?
- Is a 'Permit to Work' system needed?
- Are controls in place to stop falling objects when working at height?
- Have suitable emergency evacuation and rescue procedures been put into place?



What do I need to put into place?

- Undertake risk assessments for all areas covering risks associated with falls from height making sure they're tailored to the environment.
- Put into place all the controls that you've identified as being required to reduce the risk in your risk assessments. This could include:
 - » Doing as much work as possible from ground level.
 - » Considering falls into an opening in the floor, a hole in the ground or from a vehicle.
 - » Details of how to safely get to and from where they're working.
 - » Specifying any equipment that needs to be used with instructions on how to operate it safely.
 - » Special requirements for high-risk areas and external areas.
 - » Requirements for footwear.
- » Maintenance details for all high level access equipment and any safety equipment used whilst working at height.
- » The process for reporting defects and other issues and how these should be managed until the defects or issues have been repaired or rectified.
- » Reviewing accidents and incidents to help identify where further improvements can be made.
- » Making sure that all risk assessments are reviewed regularly (annually or when there are major changes to the business).
- Make sure that all employees are trained on the controls that are in place. This needs to include:
 - » New employees before they start work.
 - » Existing employees when new processes, equipment and controls are introduced.
 - » Regular refresher training for all.
 - » Make sure appropriate training is put in place for agency or temporary employees.
 - » Remember to keep records of all training.



Common mistakes to try to avoid

- Taking short cuts and not having procedures in place to make sure that only safe and well maintained, high-level access equipment which is suitable for the task is used.
- Not using stepladders and ladders correctly and in a safe manner such as over-reaching or using ladders of an incorrect type or size.
- Not considering the risks from falls from height from all areas and for all relevant tasks such as loading and unloading vehicles.
- Not properly controlling risks associated with fragile roof areas and roof works.
- Untrained members of the team using high level access equipment.
- Ground conditions or weather conditions not considered when completing risk assessments.
- No consideration given to preventing unauthorised access to high levels or use of equipment, including by members of the public including children.
- Using the forks or pallets on fork lift truck to gain access – it should always be a proprietary cage.
- Not controlling equipment brought onto your premises by contractors i.e. poor quality ladders.

Where can I find more information?

- [Health and Safety: Working at height \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk)
- [Key messages for safety when working at height – HSE](#)
- [Construction - Working at height industry health & safety \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk)
- [Falls from height \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk)
- [Safe use of ladders and stepladders](#)
- [Risk assessment: Template and examples - HSE](#)

References: Working at height

- [Health and safety statistics](#)



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