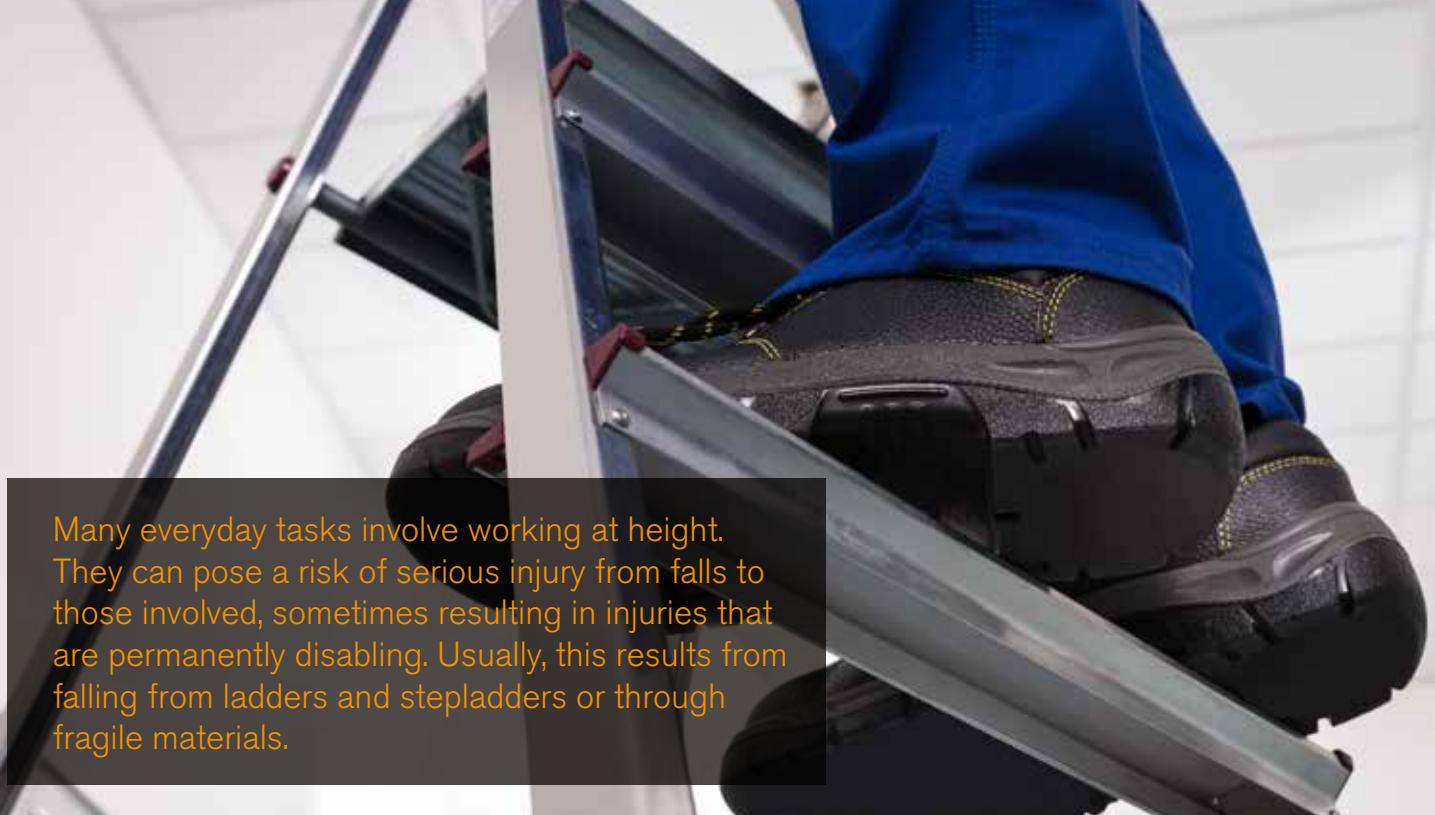


Working at Height



Many everyday tasks involve working at height. They can pose a risk of serious injury from falls to those involved, sometimes resulting in injuries that are permanently disabling. Usually, this results from falling from ladders and stepladders or through fragile materials.

Falls can also occur from raised, open edges that are not adequately protected by handrails or other features (e.g. balustrades). Sometimes, they can occur during roof work or where temporary work platforms are used (e.g. scaffolds and mobile access towers).

Legal requirements

Generally, if someone is injured you may need to show that you have met your duty of care.

If you are an employer you must comply with the general requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations. More specifically, you must also comply with the Work at Height Regulations. You must also comply with these if you have control of this sort of work completed by others. In controlling this work, you will only need to comply with the requirements to the extent of your control.

'Work at height' means any work in any place (including a place at or below ground level) from which a person could fall a distance liable to cause personal injury. The regulations extend to cover access to and from such a place (except by a staircase in a permanent workplace).

Broadly, the regulations require:

- the organising and planning of such work
- that persons are competent (or supervised by competent persons)
- certain steps to be taken to avoid risk from work at height

- the correct selection and specification of work equipment
- the avoidance of risks from fragile surfaces, falling objects and danger areas
- the inspection of certain work equipment and of places of work at height.

Additional requirements might also apply in some circumstances (e.g. where work equipment, such as a ladder, is used, the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations would also apply).

Other duties relating to the prevention of falls more generally are set out in the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations. If you are an employer or have control of premises used as workplace, you will need to comply with these also. The term 'workplace' is very broad including not only factories, shops and offices but, also schools, hospitals, hotels and places of entertainment.

Hazards to look out for

Internal	External	General
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tasks at height e.g. changing light bulbs; cleaning, painting and decorating; putting up decorations and displays Inadequate rails or barriers at raised edges Unprotected fragile roofing or ceiling material where work or access is required (including roof voids) Contact with obstructions, structural elements or other architectural features. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tasks at height e.g. replacing security light bulbs; clearing leaves and vegetation from gutters and roofs; window cleaning; general repairs and maintenance Inadequate edge protection (e.g. guard-rails and toe-boards) at roof level where work or access is required Unprotected roof lights or other fragile roofing material where work or access is required Damaged or deteriorating masonry or other architectural features which might be relied upon to afford protection Contact with overhead electricity lines Adverse weather making work at height unsafe (e.g. high winds, snow and ice). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access equipment unsuitable for the task in hand Damaged ladders, stepladders or other access equipment Unauthorised alterations to equipment Poorly stored ladders, stepladders or other access equipment The incorrect use of equipment including ladders, stepladders, scaffolding and so on i.e. not in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, design or load capabilities.

Precautions you can take

Typical precautions include:

- Ensuring that work is properly planned in advance
- Avoiding the need for work at height in the first place (say, completing it from ground level)
- Using existing places at height to work from where these are suitable (i.e. they have safe access, protected edges etc.)
- Using suitable access equipment depending upon the nature and duration of the work (e.g. scaffolding, access towers, ladders, stepladders etc.)
- Providing adequate edge protection (i.e. handrails, toe boards) to working platforms and access routes at height

- Using personal fall protection (e.g. harnesses)
- Using ladders only where their use is justified because of the low risk, and either the work is of short duration or there are existing features at your premises that cannot be altered
- Providing safe access to places of work at height
- Making sure access equipment is properly used (e.g. to prevent overloading or overreaching)
- Avoiding the need for work on or near fragile surfaces – including roof lights
- Protecting fragile surfaces (e.g. by providing suitable platforms, coverings, guard rails, warning signs etc.)
- Using suitable access equipment near fragile surfaces (e.g. roof ladders, crawling boards, etc.)
- Preventing materials or objects likely to cause injury from falling (e.g. making sure they are suitably stored and will not be thrown or tipped from height)
- Taking suitable precautions if work is required near overhead services and/or equipment
- Providing information and training on the safe use of access equipment
- Making sure no work at height is carried out when there are adverse weather conditions
- Making sure access equipment is periodically inspected for wear or damage and is properly maintained.

Making a start

ACTION	GUIDANCE
<p>1. Identify circumstances where work or access at height may be required.</p> <p>Make a note of these.</p>	Where you are an employer you will need to complete formal risk assessments. These should identify these circumstances for you.
<p>2. Where work or access at height is required, check the precautions you have taken are adequate. If they are not, identify any additional ones that are needed.</p> <p>Pay particular attention to the precautions for the safe use of ladders or stepladders.</p> <p>Make a note of the precautions in place and/or any additional ones that might be required. Also, note who will be responsible for taking them.</p>	<p>Formal risk assessments should check the adequacy of any existing precautions, noting anything further that needs to be done.</p> <p>Typical precautions are set out above. You can use this list to help decide if any further precautions are necessary. These will vary depending on your particular circumstances.</p> <p>Where practicable, it is better to avoid working at height (e.g. completing the work from ground level using extendable tools).</p> <p>If this is not possible, you should prevent falls by using an existing place that is already safe (e.g. stable with safe access and fixed edge protection) or the right type of equipment (e.g. scaffolds, ladders, stepladders etc.).</p> <p>If using ladders, you may need to show that this is justified. Normally, this would be because of the low risk associated with the work, and either the work is of short duration or there are existing features at your premises that cannot be altered.</p> <p>For smaller premises, many tasks are usually low-risk (e.g. painting, cleaning, etc.) and of short duration (i.e. staying up a leaning ladder or stepladder for less than 30 minutes at a time).</p> <p>Where this is not the case or where ladders cannot be used safely (i.e. where the ladder will be level, stable, and 'secured'), it is recommended that you consider alternative equipment.</p>

ACTION	GUIDANCE
<p>3. Ensure that the precautions you have identified are taken and remain in place for as long as is necessary.</p> <p>Make a note of any checks or inspections you make to ensure these precautions are being taken or equipment remains safe.</p>	<p>You may have to take special precautions and carry out inspections in certain circumstances (e.g. where you use scaffolds; fall arrest systems; ladders; stepladders etc.)</p> <p>You may also need other precautions to guard against falling materials or objects; prevent unauthorised access to work areas; ensure safe access; use lifting equipment; provide adequate lighting; ensure safety around overhead services and/or equipment; ensure the correct use of personal protective equipment etc.</p> <p>If using ladders or stepladders make sure they are the right type for the job and that those using them know how to do so safely.</p>
<p>4. Avoid the need for work on or near fragile surfaces – including roof lights.</p>	<p>Where this is not possible identify and implement other precautions to prevent falls (e.g. by providing suitable platforms, coverings, guard rails, roof ladders, crawling boards, warning signs etc.)</p>
<p>5. Ensure that no work at height is carried out when weather conditions make the work or access unsafe.</p>	<p>Work should not proceed when weather conditions increase the risk of an accident occurring, such as during high winds, heavy rain, snow and ice.</p>
<p>6. Ensure that employees and volunteers are provided with any necessary information, training or supervision where this is appropriate.</p> <p>Make a note of any information or training that is provided, particularly in relation to the use of ladders and stepladders.</p>	<p>The level of information and training required will vary depending on the nature of the work and your particular circumstances. If you have completed formal risk assessments, these will help you determine what will be necessary.</p> <p>Where tasks involve the use of ladders or stepladders, making sure employees and volunteers receive simple instruction on how to use the equipment safely would be sufficient. However, where more sophisticated equipment (e.g. a mobile access tower or scaffold) is to be used then more specialist training will be necessary.</p> <p>You should keep records of any information or training you provide. These should contain detail relating to the persons who were trained (including their signatures to say that they have received and understood the training); when they were trained and by whom; an overview of the training that was provided etc.</p>
<p>7. Document your arrangements and responsibilities for managing work at height.</p> <p>Review these where necessary, particularly if you suspect they are no longer valid.</p> <p>Retain records of the notes you have made in steps, 1, 2, 3 and 6.</p>	<p>If you need to prepare a health and safety policy, you could record your arrangements as part of it.</p> <p>In the event of a claim, paperwork will be important so you should retain appropriate records. These could include any records of any accidents or their investigation, risk assessments, event safety plans, training records etc.</p>

Want to know more?

Other useful health and safety information is available on our [website](#).

Further guidance and resources are also available at: www.hse.gov.uk.

Note: if you are in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey or the Isle of Man, then regional variations might apply. In this instance, you should check the guidance provided by the enforcing authority for your region. This will be freely available on their website.

Need to contact us?

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