

Loss Prevention Standards

Work at Height

Introduction

Many of us work at height, sometimes without realising that we are, for example standing on a stool to reach a high shelf in the office, using low steps. Working at height is considered to be anything above ground level.

The official definition for a fall from height is 'a fall from one level to a lower level'. Other areas are classed as working from height including where a fall from an edge or through a fragile surface could happen or a fall from ground level into an opening or hole in the ground, e.g. pub cellar hatches. It does not, however, include a fall from a slip or trip on the same level or walking up and down a permanent staircase in a building.

Another consideration is falling objects and the injuries they could cause to someone nearby whilst working at height.

When thinking about accident cause classifications for reporting and trend analysis purposes, do not fall into the trap of putting slips, trips and falls under one category, and differentiate all types as they largely have different contributory root causes and therefore should be treated differently. You may actually be surprised as to what your significant root causes of accident/incident are.

This document is intended to provide best practice guidance around working at height and tips to minimise the risk of personal injury and defend claims.

Eliminating the Need to Work at Height

Wherever possible, eliminate the need to work at height. Examples of good practice include:

- Remote access via drone or telescopic extendable camera poles, e.g. for high-level inspections of fragile roof or roof void conditions
- Work layout and design considerations – laying cables at low level, fitting permanent stairs/steps for access to items such as; silos, tanks
- Ground level working wherever possible

Risk Assessment

A good quality documented risk assessment for all tasks where work at height cannot be avoided is essential, and should ensure:

- Work is planned and organised effectively
- All potential hazards are identified – fragile surfaces, openings, pits and hatches, windows and balconies, access platforms across conveyors/production machinery, vehicle access and egress
- Frequency of use is considered, e.g. access requirements to roofs, basements/cellars, silos and tanks, tops of vehicles, loading bays, mezzanine floors
- Design and layout of fixed physical means of access – stairs, steps, ladders. Could these be improved?
- Mobile access – right access equipment for the job. Is it sufficient for all?
- Training and competency of those undertaking the work, particularly where specialist equipment is required, e.g. mobile elevating work platforms (MEWPs), scaffolding, mobile towers
- Safe working practices – consider weather conditions for external working at height, activities such as hot work



Incident Investigations

When an accident or near miss does occur, these are the things that you should consider as part of the investigation (the list is not exhaustive):

- Was the cause work at height according to the definition in the introduction section earlier, or should it be categorised differently for reporting purposes?
- What equipment was being used at the time of the accident?
- Was the right equipment being used for the job?
- Was any equipment being used defective?
- Task being undertaken at the time of the accident/near miss, could it have been done in a different safer way?
- Weather conditions at the time, and time of day/night?
- What is the content of the risk assessment/safe system of work (SSOW); is it suitable and was it being followed?
- Appropriate equipment inspections had been carried out and documented?
- Appropriate training/competency has been carried out and records are available?

Keep documentation from investigations in case of a future potential claim.

Stair and Step Considerations

On average around 1,000 major accidents are caused on workplace stairs and steps every year (Health and Safety Executive - HSE). Where stairs or steps are used for access purposes, such as for: roofs, plant rooms, silos, and fire escape routes, hazards should be removed wherever possible.

Things to consider:

- The design complies with current British Standards/Building Regulations as a minimum
- Consistency of stair dimensions is important to minimise the risk of missteps
- Handrail design – 900mm to 1000mm, allows a firm grip and coloured to be easily distinguishable
- Do not use curved nosings as it's more difficult to judge where the edge of the step is
- Slip resistant surface – think about potential contaminants
- Keep clean and dry as much as possible and free of obstacles
- Lighting – think about both internal and external
- Human factors – do people have to carry objects that may obscure view, or could they be distracted?

Hot Work on Roofs

The main concern here is the additional risk of starting a fire on/in the roof that may spread very quickly as this will be a temporary hot work site. Fires caused by hot work activities are common. A permit to work for both hot work and working at height should always be used in these circumstances (see [Aviva Loss Prevention Standard Hot Work Operations](#)).

Remove any potential flammable materials/loose debris from the area, use a non-combustible cover or dampen down where possible to prevent the spread of sparks. Ensure that appropriate fire extinguishers are available, and a suitable fire watch is in place. If using acetylene cylinders, these must be taken off site at the end of each day. Consideration should also be given to providing optical protection to shield others who may be working nearby, and what may be below the area being welded could catch light.

Checklist

A generic Work at Height Checklist is presented in Appendix 1 which can be tailored to your own organisation.

Additional Information

- [Work at Height](#) – Health and Safety Executive
- [The Work at Height Regulations 2005](#)
- [The International Powered Access Federation \(IPAF\)](#)

Further risk management information can be obtained from [Aviva Risk Management Solutions](#)



Please Note

This document contains general information and guidance and is not and should not be relied on as specific advice. The document may not cover every risk, exposure or hazard that may arise and Aviva recommend that you obtain specific advice relevant to the circumstances. AVIVA accepts no responsibility or liability towards any person who may rely upon this document.



Appendix 1 – Work at Height Checklist

Location	
Date	
Completed by (name and signature)	

	Work at Height Checklist	Y/N	Comments
1.	Risk assessments identify all activities which require work at height?		
2.	Work at height is avoided where possible?		
3.	Accident reports correctly identify work at height as a distinct cause category?		
4.	Investigations identify root causes effectively and implement appropriate remedial action?		
5.	Training and competency records are maintained and up to date?		
6.	There is an inventory and inspections for all work at height equipment and records are maintained?		
7.	A permit to work is issued for high hazard work at height, e.g. roof work?		
8.	A hot work permit to work is in place where applicable?		
9.	Additional comments:		

