

Loss prevention standards

Work at Height

Advice for organisations on how to manage
the inherent risks of working 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 or using low steps. Working at height is anything that is above ground level.

The [Work at Height Regulations 2005](#) define a fall from height as ‘a fall from one level to another level’. Examples of working from height include 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 is being undertaken, e.g. on scaffolding.

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. Differentiate into three separate categories as they often have different contributory root causes and therefore should be treated as separate types of incident. Done in this way, you may be surprised as to what your significant root cause analysis actually identifies.

This document is intended to provide best practice guidance around working at height and tips to minimise the risk of personal injuries occurring. Additionally, it should assist with improving claims defensibility prospects.

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 voids
- Work layout and design considerations – laying cables at low level, fitting permanent stairs/steps for access to items such as silos or 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 such as 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, and activities such as hot work

Incident Investigations

When an accident or near miss does occur, these are some of 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 any equipment being used defective?
- Tasks 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 access equipment inspections had been carried out and documented, e.g. ladders, MEWPS, scaffolding?

Keep all documentation from investigations in case of future potential claims.

Stair and Step Considerations

Where stairs or steps are used for access purposes, such as for roofs, plant rooms, silos and fire escape routes, any hazards should be removed wherever possible.

Things to consider include:

- The design complies with the 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 for a firm grip and should be coloured to be easily distinguishable from the surroundings
- Do not use curved nosings as its 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 lighting. For more information see the Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers (CIBSE) [LG16: Lighting for Stairs \(2017\)](#) and Health and Safety Executive [HSG38 Lighting at Work](#)
- Human factors – do people have to carry objects up and down stairs that may obscure their view, or could they be distracted or need to rush causing human error?
- Maintenance and cleaning of stairs programmes. Are prompt repairs carried out when defects are identified?
- Spillage reporting and cleaning procedures in place and effective

Hot Work on Roofs

The main concern 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. For further guidance and information on this topic, refer to the Aviva Loss Prevention Standard *Hot Work Operations*.

Remove any potential combustible and flammable materials/loose debris from the area and use a non-combustible cover to 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 **it's essential to consider** what may be below the area where the hot work is taking place.

Checklist

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

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Aviva Risk Management Solutions can offer access to a wide range of risk management products and services at preferential rates via our network of Specialist Partners.

For more information please visit:

[Aviva Risk Management Solutions – Specialist Partners](#)

Sources and Useful Links

- [Work at Height - HSE](#)
- [The International Powered Access Federation \(IPAF\)](#)
- [Work at Height Regulations 2005](#)

Additional Information

Relevant Aviva Risk Management Guides include:

- Hot Work Operations

To find out more, please visit [Aviva Risk Management Solutions](#) or speak to one of our advisors.

Email us at riskadvice@aviva.com or call 0345 366 6666*

*Calls may be recorded and/or monitored for our joint protection.

Appendix 1 – Work at Height Checklist



Location	
Date	
Completed by (name and signature)	

	Work at Height Checklist	Y/N	Comments
1.	Is there a suitable and sufficient risk assessment in place for all work at height activities?		
2.	Is work at height avoided wherever possible?		
3.	Do accident and near miss reports correctly identify work at height as a distinct cause category?		
4.	Do investigations identify root causes effectively and implement appropriate remedial action?		
5.	Are there arrangements in place to ensure all access equipment is correctly used and suitably maintained?		
6.	Are training and competency records maintained and are they up to date?		
7.	Is there an inventory and inspection of all work at height equipment, e.g. ladders, step ladders, mobile access platforms, and are appropriate records maintained?		
8.	Is there an effective defect reporting and repair process in place?		
9.	Is a permit to work issued for high hazard work at height, e.g. roof work?		
10.	If hot work is required on a roof, is a hot work permit in place where applicable?		

	Work at Height Checklist Contd.	Y/N	Comments
11.	Additional comments:		

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