

Falls from Height



Item Code FS320009 February 09 Edition no 2

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Many activities in Scouting, particularly those relating to maintenance on buildings such as Scout Headquarters and Campsites, involve some type of work at height. Other risky areas might include setting up activities, pioneering projects or even preparing for a fundraising fete.

Any work at height creates risks. Falls from height, even low level falls, can have serious consequences. So the first consideration when planning such work is to decide whether the work has to be done at height...can a flag pole be lowered to free a trapped lanyard; can the notice board be re-painted after it has been taken down rather than doing it in situ?

If the work has to be done at height then consider how the risks of falling can be reduced. Hiring a scaffold platform, with a guardrail around it, to fix a guttering is a better option than trying to tackle the job from a ladder.

If you choose to use a scaffold tower, ensure that it is erected by a competent person, who has been properly trained to do so.

So before you undertake work at height...

- Decide whether you have to?
- Decide what is the best work equipment to use?

By this stage you are already on your way to completing your risk assessment. Other things you must consider are:

- If someone needs to climb onto a roof, will it support them? Not just the one individual you planned for the job - but others that may come and join them plus

any materials etc that are taken onto the roof.

- Are there any sky-lights or other fragile material you could fall through?
- If materials need to be removed from height can they be safely lowered to the ground rather than thrown in a haphazard manner.
- Does the work area need to be segregated by barriers so that passers-by are not at risk and vehicles cannot hit any of the work equipment?

Prolonged use of ladders should be really seen as the last resort. This is because ladders slipping or falling is the cause of most falls from height. If after all the consideration and planning it is decided that a ladder is the most appropriate piece of work equipment then it is essential that you consider the following to reduce your risk: -

- Ladders should only be used for light work for no more than 30 minutes in any one position.
- Ladders should not be used for work which requires effort or force such as use of electric drill, pulling cables / wires etc.
- Ladders must be good condition with feet in good order. Users must conduct a visual check before using ladder.
- Ladders must be secured before being used. Preferably use a securing hook to secure before climbing. In absence of securing hook, ladders should be secured by lashing at top [or bottom] before being used.
- Position ladder 4:1 [75 degree] angle.

- Both feet of ladder must be in contact with the ground / surface which is not slippery.
 - Rungs and footwear should be checked for grease and wetness before use.
 - Do not over-reach. Always keep your knees within the uprights of the ladder. The user's body kept within the up-rights [stiles].
 - Users should not stand above the top three rungs of the ladder
 - Only one person to be on the ladder at any one time.
 - Three-points of contact must be maintained at all times [e.g. two feet, one hand]
 - Don't carry heavy or awkward shaped loads on a ladder.
 - Never carry loads heavier than 25kg – anything over 10kg should be avoided if possible.
 - A non-conductive ladder must be used when sources of live electricity are likely to be present.
- *Ensure adequate supervision of the work all the time*
 - *Follow the guidance above*

Sources of further information

- The Health and Safety Executive (HSE)
HSE Infoline – 0845 345 0055
www.hse.gov.uk/falls/

Again, when using Step-Ladders most of the above applies but also remember: -

- Ensure all locking devices are in working order.
- Do not work off the top three steps unless a safe handhold is available.
- Avoid side-on working
- Do not overreach – make sure that your belt buckle stays with the up-rights and that both feet are kept on the same rung or step throughout the task.

Top Tips

So the secret of safe working at height is:

- *Avoid working at height if possible*
- *Carefully plan the work*
- *Conduct a thorough risk assessment*
- *Select the most suitable work equipment*