

## **Work At Height**

**Year after year, falls from height have killed more people on construction sites than any other type of accident.**

**What a waste, given that every fall from height is preventable – had the right method of work, equipment, or behaviour been used.**

**Don't think you have to fall a great distance, people falling less than 1.5m – chest height – have died from their injuries.**

- One sure way not to fall from height is not to work at height in the first place and this should always be our first consideration.

Options may include using long-handled tools, or rescheduling the works until permanent access is complete.

- Unfortunately in our industry there is often no alternative, in which case, we have to plan carefully our method of work.
- First option if we have to work from height is to be within a protected area – this means solid platform, no gaps and edge protection in all places we could fall. Edge protection has to be at least 950mm high and not have any gaps larger than 450mm.

Most of us instinctively know if edge protection is too low. If in doubt, check, if too low – stop.

- There are many ways of getting a “protected area”, including:-
  - traditional scaffolds
  - tower scaffolds
  - mobile elevated work platforms, cherrypickers and scissor lifts
  - podium steps
  - the existing structure

All these give protected areas/platforms that when properly used, stop people falling.

- The next option to stop us falling is to use harnesses and lines that act as work restraint – keep you tied back like a dog on a lead to stop you from falling from the edge even if you tried.

This option needs very careful planning, strict implementation and there are opportunities for it to be abused. On the rare occasions it is a viable option, it is normally operated with the next option.

- The next option is to catch people who have already fallen, using nets or airbags – again, needs very careful planning and strict implementation.
- The final option is to use individual harness and lines that catch us if we fall, the line incorporates a shock absorber.

- We have just outlined the work at height “hierarchy” that we should all know.  
  
Option 1: Not working at height  
Option 2: Working from a protected platform that stops us from falling  
Option 3: Using work restraint equipment that stops us from falling  
Option 4: Air bags or nets that catches anybody from falling  
Option 5: Harness and line that only catches the individual who is wearing it properly
- We should only move down this list if we can't do the option above.
- If you plan to use a harness and line as fall arrest, it normally means you haven't planned your work properly – this is not a good method of work.

Did you know:-

- You need a clear, uninterrupted distance of about 6m for the line to stop you falling before you hit the deck?
- Even if this works, there is a condition called suspension trauma that can kill you in as little as 5 minutes if you are not rescued?

Some other salient points:-

- Be very careful of fragile surfaces such as rooflights – don't work on any surface unless you know it's not fragile. If you don't know, don't go onto the surface until you find out.
- Think of ladders (any ladder, pole ladder, stepladder, etc) as being at the bottom of the hierarchy – are you sure you can't use a tower scaffold?

We will only let you use a ladder if you have justified this through a written risk assessment.

- Podium steps have come to the fore in recent years as an alternative to stepladders.

Be careful of their limitations, some are narrow and overreaching or sideways force can turn them over – we have had a number of these accidents.

- Any work equipment is only any good if it's installed properly and in good condition – you need to be trained, and the equipment needs to be regularly inspected – check and stop if in doubt.

**Remember:**

**Planning is everything – fail to plan and plan to fail**

**Questions:**

- 1 What is the hierarchy for working at height?
- 2 What equipment will give you a protected platform?
- 3 What is wrong with harnesses?

Further Information:- CIP Manual, Section 7