

# WORKING AT HEIGHT

BIGGA'S Health & Safety series produced by Xact



**Falls from height cause over 40 deaths and 3,000 major injuries per year in the workplace. This incident is recognised as the major cause of death and one of the main causes of major injury at work.**

A place is defined as being at height if a person could be injured falling from it. It is commonly thought working over a specific height (2m) requires precautions in place to prevent injury. However, as the above definition from the Work at Height Legislation illustrates, falls from any height are covered even if this is at or below ground level. Examples of typical activities which could come under the legislation would be: Working from a vehicle or trailer; Tree pruning off the ground; Maintenance work involving ladders or steps; Work in pits and silos.

Employers who control the work of others have a duty to ensure:

- Persons expected to work at height are trained to safely do so - don't suffer any condition that may affect their ability to work safely when at height
- Equipment used for is maintained and inspected by a competent person
- Work is planned, organised and risk assessed prior to work starting
- The location is safe e.g. protected from moving traffic
- The work takes into account ongoing weather conditions that may endanger workers safety
- Fragile roof surfaces/roof lights are suitably protected to prevent falls
- The risks of others being injured by falling objects is recognised and controlled

Most people working at height use a ladder/steps. While nobody is suggesting under the Work at Height Legislation that ladders/steps are banned, their use now needs to be justified to ensure they are the most suitable means of access compared to other equipment options by means of a risk assessment. Ladders/steps should only be used for working at height where:

- Work is of short duration (max 30mins)
- Work is of a light nature, they are not suitable for heavy work involving lifting of heavy loads
- A suitable handhold is available along with maintaining three points of contact when on the ladder
- Operators are not required to overreach i.e. the person's centre of gravity (belt buckle) should always be kept within the stiles (uprights) of the ladder
- Side-loading is not involved – it should be avoided as the ladder may over-tip. Where possible always face the job in hand. Where this is not possible additional stability devices will be required
- Correct angle of 75o can be maintained i.e. 1 unit out for every 4 up
- Regular inspections are carried out to ensure they are safe to use
- Correct class of steps/ladder is employed. Domestic type ladders are not suitable for use in commercial workplaces.

More information can be had from INDG 401 and INDG402 on the HSE website [www.hse.gov](http://www.hse.gov)

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