

Work at Height Policy

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Scope

This policy applies to everyone working at height, including those using step stools, step ladders and ladders. It is written specifically for NAS employees but should also be referenced when considering work undertaken by contractors and others.

Policy Summary

Falling from a height has the potential to cause serious injury. Falls are the biggest cause of deaths in Britain's workplaces. In the period 2018/19 there were 40 fatalities with 18,476 RIDDOR reported incidents attributed to falling from heights

Risk Assessment

Working at height must be avoided, where possible, for example, use water fed poles with brushes for window cleaning. If it is not possible to eliminate the need for working at height then a risk assessment must be carried out which shows what equipment is to be used (including Personal Protective Equipment – PPE) and what measures are to be taken. Consideration must be given to minimise the distance and consequence of any fall.

The risk assessment should take into account all aspects of working at height. For example, working in a roof space may present additional risks where lighting might be poor, walkways inadequate, headroom limited and rescue in an emergency could be difficult.

Where there are significant work at height risks then a Permit to Work must be used (see HS-0310 Permit to Work Policy)

Policy

All work at height must:

- be properly planned and organised,
- take into account weather conditions,
- not normally be undertaken by lone workers,
- only be undertaken by trained, competent workers,
- only take place in a safe area,
- only be undertaken using equipment that has been inspected and is safe,
- only be carried out when risks from fragile surfaces are properly controlled,
- only be carried out when risks from falling objects are properly controlled.

Equipment

Ladders, step ladders and step stools are designed for access or work of short duration only. Scaffolding or mobile elevating platforms should be used where work is to be carried out over a substantial period of time. For example, a properly erected ladder may be appropriate for window cleaning but not for window replacement or maintenance.

Ladders and step ladders should be selected to suit the purpose. Different grades of ladder are available. Make sure that the ladder you use is strong enough for the task. A Class 1 ladder to BS 2037 is preferred. Ladders over 6 metres should not normally be used since additional precautions for use and handling are required. The purchase and use of wooden ladders or step ladders is not permitted.

Access equipment must never be left unattended where there is a risk that service users could use it inappropriately. Where it cannot easily be removed when unattended, it must be suitably and safely disabled.

Inspections

Ladders and step ladders should be capable of being individually identified, by a unique marking / serial number. Apart from inspection by the user before and after use they should be examined regularly and at least every year, by a competent person. If they are found to be defective they must be suitably labelled or marked and withdrawn from service until repaired or destroyed.

The inspection should include checking rungs, treads, crossbars and stiles for defect, rung to stile connections, ropes, cables and all fittings, lock wheels, pulleys, rivets, screws, stays and hinges. They should also be checked for twisting, distortion, oxidisation, corrosion and excessive wear, especially on treads.

Where eye-bolts are provided for safety harnesses they must be tested periodically by a competent person.

A record must be kept of the inspections.

Use of Ladders and Step Ladders

Securing the Ladder

The foot of the ladder should be supported on a firm level surface and should not rest on loose material or on other equipment to gain extra height.

Wherever practicable the top of the ladder should be securely fixed to the structure so that it cannot slip. Lashings, straps or proprietary clips can be used. While lashings are being secured the ladder should be “footed”.

A ladder fitted with a proprietary spreader arm may be acceptable, provided certain conditions are met.

If the ladder cannot be secured at the top it should be secured at the base using fixing blocks or cleats, sandbags, stakes embedded in the ground etc. Where it is not practicable to do this a second person should always foot the ladder until the user has returned to the bottom. Serious accidents have occurred because the person responsible for footing the ladder has wandered off to do other work.

Footing is not considered effective for ladders longer than 5 metres.

Safe Use of Ladders

Ladders must not be overloaded – they are liable to break. Only one person should be on the ladder at any one time.

Users must check the condition of the ladder before use. Damaged ladders must be taken out of use immediately. Makeshift repairs to a damaged ladder must not be made.

The user must not overreach.

Ladders should extend at least 1.05 metres above the platform or other landing place or above the highest rung on which the user has to stand, unless there is a suitable handhold to reduce the risk of overbalancing.

The ladder must be placed at a suitable angle to minimise the risk of it slipping outwards (ideally about 75 degrees to the horizontal, i.e. 1 metre out from the building for every 4 metres in height). Some ladders are marked with a line which when parallel with the structure indicates that the angle of the ladder is correct.

The top of the ladder must rest against a solid surface. It should not rest against plastic gutters, hedges or other such unstable surfaces. Appropriate equipment such as ladder stays and spreader arms can be used for some types of work.

Heavy items and loose tools must never be carried up a ladder. Light tools should be carried in a holster attached to a belt, or in a tool bag. Other tools and materials should be raised or lowered on a rope.

It is important that mud or grease, etc. is cleaned off footwear before any attempt is made to climb a ladder. Where ladders are contaminated they should be taken out of service and cleaned.

Sections of extension ladders should overlap by a minimum of:

- Up to 5 metres (16 feet) closed length = 1 ½ rungs
- Between 5 metres and 6 metres (20 feet) closed length = 2 ½ rungs
- Over 6 metres (not normally used) closed length = 3 ½ rungs

The user should raise and lower the ladder from the base and should ensure that the hooks are properly engaged. Care must be taken to ensure that proper lifting techniques are used when operating an extension ladder so that the risk of strain and injury is reduced.

Ladders must not be used where there is a danger of either the ladder or the user coming into contact with overhead electric cables.

The work area must be adequately guarded to prevent injury to the user and to passers-by.

Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) must be worn, e.g. head protection to protect from falling objects.

Additional Precautions for the Safe Use of Stepladders

Stepladders are not designed for any degree of side loading and must be positioned at right-angles to the work. They should be spread to their fullest extent and properly levelled for stability.

Do not use the top platform for work unless it is designed with special handholds.

Do not overreach or the stepladder is liable to overturn.

Rear parts of the steps should not be used for foot support.

If steps are used in a doorway the door should be wedged open securely.

Stepladders are prevented from spreading by means of stays, chains or cords. These should be of sufficient and equal length, kept in good order, and should be renewed if found to be defective.

Roof Ladders and Roof Work

These must be the subject of a special risk assessment. It will normally be more appropriate for specialist contractors to carry out work on roofs.

Scaffolding

Scaffolding should not normally be used by NAS employees.

Contractors

Help and advice in the selection and appointment of specialist contractors can be obtained from the Area Facilities Manager.

Contractors should use their own access equipment and tools.

Equipment used by contractors should be to the same standard, as that required for NAS equipment.

Contractors, including window-cleaning contractors, should always carry out a risk assessment before work commences. They must work in safe manner and be stopped if any unsafe practices are observed.

Contractors must be made aware of any risks, known to the NAS that may affect their safety whilst working at height.

Key Management Actions

- Ensure that work at height is only carried out following introduction of all measures shown in this policy and following risk assessment.
- Carry out inspections of equipment used to work at height.
- Ensure workers are adequately trained.