



Do's and don'ts for working at heights

Whether you're a builder, window cleaner, roofer or working in any other type of trade involving working at heights there are some serious points for you and your employer to consider beyond having a hard hat and harness to remain safe. There are some serious do's and don'ts that need to be considered and implemented in order to prevent serious incidents or even fatalities at work.

The Health and Safety Executive's media centre publishes news reports about employers fined for violating Health and Safety Regulations, with numerous accounts of employees injured from falls while working at height.

Recent reports of falls from heights at work

Recent reports highlight that in September 2016, a roofing company faced prosecution and a fine of £5,000 following an incident where a worker fell seven metres from a scaffold access ladder during chimney repair work. The HSE report points out the company's failure to properly identify and enforce measures to mitigate the risk of falling through the roof after the removal of boards. Because of the accident, the employee suffered two broken wrists and four skull fractures, resulting in a fifteen-day hospital stay.

Hazard Identification and Control Failures

In September 2016, authorities fined a factory £210,000 and ordered it to pay costs because a worker fell seven meters through a roof skylight onto a concrete floor and died shortly after the fall. The [HSE](#) investigation found that the company failed to appreciate the risks to their maintenance workers when working on the roofs. They had carried out an inadequate generic risk assessment, which failed to identify the risks and control measures necessary when its employees were working at height.

In October 2016, authorities fined a roofing company £200,000. An employee of the company was installing battens on the roof near skylight openings when he accidentally stepped on a membrane covering one of these openings and fell about five metres. The HSE found that the company had not adequately identified and implemented controls to manage the risk of falling through the roof after removing the boards. The accident resulted in the employee suffering two broken wrists and four skull fractures, leading to a fifteen-day hospital stay. He has been unable to return to this line of work since.

What these examples highlight is the severity of injuries you as a business could face if you are not aware of the

dangers of working at heights and prepared for the same. The Health and Safety Executive and [RIDDOR](#) recently reported that three causes accounted for over half of worker fatalities: strikes by vehicles, hits from moving objects, or falls from heights. This is because the risk of falling from heights can occur in so many of today's professions.

What can you do to prevent an accident at work when working at heights?

The Working at Height Regulations 2005 (with 2007 amendments) cover everyone working at heights and mandate rules and precautions that employers and employees must observe. Employers must ensure the planning and organization of all activities related to working at height, carry out risk assessments, supply the appropriate equipment, and conduct training before commencing any work at height.

However, there is also a responsibility on the employee.

The [HSE](#) have published some helpful do's and don'ts when working at heights:

Do:

- Check that protection from falling objects is in place.
- Make sure there is adequate edge protection to minimise the risk of falling.
- Take extra care on fragile surfaces such as a roof and make sure the surface is stable and strong enough to support both your weight and equipment.
- Ensure that you carry out any work that can reasonably be done from the safety of the ground there when practical.

- Verify that you are using the most suitable equipment for working at height and that all equipment is fit for purpose and properly maintained.
- Confirm that everyone you are working with has also received full training and is competent for working at height.
- Consider emergency situations and make sure access is safe to the workplace at height.
- Double check everything.
- Be aware of weather conditions.

Don't:

- Don't let anyone untrained, inexperienced or otherwise incompetent carry out any work at height.
- Don't overload your working space or ladder and check products are loaded specifically and carefully.
- Don't rest ladders against weak upper surfaces e.g. plastic gutters.
- Don't overreach on a ladder. If your hands and feet can't keep in contact with the ladder on at least 3 points at all times while you are working, then you are at huge risk of falling.
- Don't use ladders for heavy tasks and only use them for light work for a short duration, usually for no

longer than 30 minutes.

Tim Blackwell, Personal Injury Solicitor & Partner at Lester Aldridge, states, "The Health and Safety Executive investigated 150 falls over a three-year period." The results of their investigations evidenced an overwhelming 40% of falls within the workplace occur whilst working on ladders, even alarmingly 20% of fatal accidents within the workplace are as a result of falling from a height, with fatal injuries occurring from heights of less than 2 meters high.

You can significantly reduce your risk of accidents by taking some simple precautions, and we endorse the #OSHtober campaign by RoSPA, focusing on preventing accidents at height throughout October this year.

Contact

For further information, please contact our highly experienced [Personal Injury & Medical Negligence team](#) via email at online.enquiries@la-law.com or call us on 01202 78626