



Ladders

A third of all UK reported fall from height incidents involve ladders or stepladders, accounting for 14 deaths and 1200 major injuries each year. Many of these injuries are caused by inappropriate or incorrect use of the equipment often ultimately caused by a lack of management control. As with all accidents involving a fall from height, injuries and related absence can be severe. Resulting claims can be expensive and have a significant impact on future premium.

MINIMUM STANDARDS

1. A risk assessment is carried out by a competent person for all tasks requiring ladder use. This takes into account special risk factors such as associated manual handling activity, ability to maintain 3 point contact, ground & weather conditions, traffic movements, footwear, fitness & experience of individuals and emergency arrangements.
2. The hierarchy of controls is considered with all tasks involving work at height, including other access & equipment options i.e. ;
 - Avoid work at height wherever possible – eliminate / substitute
 - Prevent falls from height – organisational and technical measures
 - Reduce the consequences of a fall – fall arrest equipment
3. Circumstances of use and British Standards/HSE/other guidance are considered when purchasing, selecting, and reviewing the suitability of fixed or portable ladders.
4. A system of pre-use checks, examinations & maintenance is employed considering circumstances & frequency of use, and in accordance with manufacturers' instructions.
5. Users are trained and instructed to use the equipment safely. Evidence of the employee's competence should be validated i.e. supervised, tested, and fully documented.

BEST PRACTISE

- Develop and implement policy & guidelines for ladder use.
- Research alternatives and where practicable 'design out' the need for ladder use e.g. pole extension systems for window cleaning.
- Develop documented bespoke safe working procedures & guidelines for all known tasks requiring the use of ladders, communicate to users and validate understanding.
- A permit to work system is in place to restrict and control access for high risk operations. The permit includes verification of the seeker's competence, adequate risk assessment completed and suitable control measures employed.
- Employers validate the fitness of individuals' ability to use ladders and associated tasks via suitable occupational health assessments.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

The general duties under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 to provide a safe place and system of working apply. The Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999 contains the requirement to carry out a 'suitable and sufficient' risk assessment and implement controls. Failure to complete a risk assessment will be crucial in a court of law given the inherent risks associated with ladder use and working at height. The Work at Height Regulations 2005 requires all work at height to be properly planned and appropriately supervised. The Provision & Use of Work Equipment Regulations 2002 contain requirements for the equipment itself and ensuring that employees are trained in its correct use. When considering whether ladders, their use, and systems of working are adequate employers should consult HSE, British Standards and sector guidance.

GUIDANCE & USEFUL INFORMATION

- HSE: Safe use of Ladders and Stepladders – an Employers' guide (INDG402, 2005)
- HSE: The Work at Height Regulations 2005 – a brief guide (INDG401, 2005)
- QBE Issues Forum: Working at Height (October 2006)
- British Standards Various: BS 4211/2005, BS 5395-1/2001

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