

Safe Use of Work Platforms/ Trestles

Information Sheet

This information sheet is produced for employers, employees and anyone who works at a height using work platforms or trestles. Its purpose is to inform you of some of the key issues required by the Work at Height regulations in relation to work platforms. It also tells you what you need to do to comply with the regulations.

The work at height regulations set out the basic principles for safe work at height. The Regulations apply to all work at height using a work platform i.e scaffold, trestle, gangway, where there is a risk of a fall liable to cause personal injury. The regulations replace all the earlier regulations about working at height. Prior to the Work at Height Regulations the 2 meter rule existed. This is no longer the case and all work platforms must meet the requirements of the new regulations.

What is a working platform?

The work at height regulations define a working platform as any platform used as a place of work or as a means of access to or egress from a place of work, including any scaffold, suspended scaffold, cradle, mobile platform, trestle, gangway, gantry and stairway that is so used. As you can see the definition does include trestles and therefore this equipment is subject to requirements placed on working platforms by the new regulations.

What is 'work at height'?

Work at height is work in any place, including a place at, above or below ground level, where a person could be injured if they fell from that place. Access and egress to a place of work can also be work at height.

Examples of work activities that are classified as working at height:

- ▲ working on trestles
- ▲ working on a flat roof
- ▲ erecting falsework or formwork
- ▲ working on a ladder
- ▲ working at ground level adjacent to an excavation
- ▲ working on formwork within an excavation
- ▲ working near or adjacent to fragile materials

As an employer, what do the Work at Height Regulations mean to me?

The Work at Height Regulations requires employers to ensure that:

- ▲ all work at height is properly planned and organised
- ▲ a risk assessment is carried out for all work conducted at height
- ▲ appropriate work equipment is selected and used
- ▲ people working at a height are competent
- ▲ equipment used for work at height is properly inspected and maintained

- ▲ risks from fragile surfaces are properly controlled
- ▲ the risks associated with the equipment during erection, maintenance and dismantling of such equipment are taken into account.

What is a 'risk assessment'?

A risk assessment is a careful examination of what could cause harm to people as a result of a work activity. It allows you to take the necessary precautions to prevent the harm occurring. In considering the necessary precautions the general principles of prevention must be taken into account.

The work at height regulations are based on a risk assessment approach. When considering work at height, a risk assessment should be carried out in order to identify what the hazard is and the degree of risk present.

How do I do a risk assessment?

There are five steps to a risk assessment:

1. Look at the hazards.
2. Decide who might be harmed and how.
3. Evaluate the risks and decide whether the existing precautions are adequate or whether more should be done.
4. Record your findings.
5. Review your assessment.

What do I need to consider if I am doing a risk assessment?

If you are doing a risk assessment you need to consider the following:

- ▲ the work activity
- ▲ the equipment to be used
- ▲ the duration of the work
- ▲ the location of the work activity i.e. presence of hazards such as open excavation, underground services overhead power lines etc
- ▲ the working environment, e.g. weather conditions, lighting
- ▲ condition and stability of existing work surfaces
- ▲ physical capabilities of the workers e.g. vertigo sufferers

What is required when planning to do work at height?

Any work at height needs to be planned in advance of the work activity. Careful consideration should be given to the selection and use of the work equipment so that a safe system of work is adopted. This safe system of work needs to take account of;

- ▲ any supervision of workers that may be necessary, e.g. work equipment selected lower down the hierarchy of control, such as fall arrest equipment, will require a high level of supervision;
- ▲ any weather conditions that workers may be exposed to, e.g. carrying out work on a sloped roof in icy or rainy conditions;
- ▲ any emergency or rescue procedures that may be required, e.g. if persons fall while using a fall arrest system. It is not acceptable to rely on the emergency services. It needs to be covered in the risk assessment and planned prior to the start of the work activity. The user of fall arrest equipment and sufficient numbers of persons must have received adequate training in the use of the equipment and this includes immediate rescue procedures. For example, how will an unconscious person be rescued, after falling into a net? How will a person be rescued after falling in a fall arrest harness? You may need to consider the use of a mobile elevating work platform, or tower to undertake the rescue.

What do I need to consider when selecting equipment for working at height?

When selecting work equipment for use at height, the following need to be taken into account:

- ▲ the working environment: What are the ground conditions, are there space constraints, are other people working in the same area, will members of public be affected?
- ▲ the duration and frequency of use: Is the work activity of short duration, is it repetitive?
- ▲ emergency and rescue procedures: Can a timely evacuation and/or rescue be instigated?
- ▲ the task to be carried out: Does it require the use of both hands? Is it light duty?
- ▲ the risk, including the distance and consequences of any potential fall: Can a fall from the work equipment occur? If so, does this have the potential to cause injury?
- ▲ in the case of access and egress, what is the distance to be travelled?
- ▲ any other additional risks posed by the installation, use, dismantling or removal of the work equipment.
- ▲ the dimensions of the work equipment, to ensure a safe working area and safe passage
- ▲ the potential loadings of persons, equipment and materials
- ▲ is it appropriate for the nature of the work to be undertaken? The type of work equipment required should be selected in conjunction with the risk assessment in accordance with the hierarchy of control

What do I have to do about falls below 2 metres?

There has always been a duty to use a safe system of work and to prevent people from falling from any height. Under the construction regulations all falls were required to be prevented. For falls under 2 m a risk assessment determines what precautions are taken, while for over 2 m, the use of guardrails and working platforms (or other similar equipment) to prevent falls were required. Traditionally this meant that while using trestles for blockwork, plastering or access, that guardrails and toeboards were not required. This is no longer the case.

The work at height regulations require the risk of a fall to be prevented wherever a fall is liable to cause personal injury. This means that for any height where there is a risk of a fall causing personal injury then measures should be taken to prevent injury.

The old division between low and high falls has gone. The duty is to prevent falls. There are almost as many low-fall injuries as high-fall injuries and low falls cause many serious injuries.

The work at height regulations requires you to take a sensible risk-based approach to preventing falls. Where it is reasonably practicable to take precautions to prevent a fall, steps should be taken to do so.

However, it is essential that a sensible and pragmatic approach is taken when addressing low falls, so precautions should only be taken when the scope and duration of the work presents a risk of injury. If the risk is trivial and it is not reasonably practical to take other precautions, then no action needs to be taken apart from training and instruction.

What are the requirements for using working platforms/trestles?

In considering whether a platform is suitable for work at height, employers need to ensure that it is:

- ▲ of sufficient dimensions to allow safe passage and safe use of equipment and materials;
- ▲ free from trip hazards or gaps through which persons or materials could fall;
- ▲ fitted with toeboards and handrails;
- ▲ kept clean and tidy, e.g. do not allow mortar and debris to build up on platforms;
- ▲ not loaded so as to give rise to a risk of collapse or to any deformation that could affect its safe use. This is particularly relevant in relation to blockwork loaded on trestles;
- ▲ erected on firm level ground to ensure equipment remains stable during use.

Is it necessary to inspect working platforms?

Work equipment, including working platforms at any height, including trestles must be inspected before use where the safety of the equipment depends on how it was erected or assembled. The purpose of such an inspection is to identify whether the equipment is fit for its purpose, has been properly assembled or installed, and can be used safely. Work equipment exposed to conditions causing deterioration that is liable to result in danger must be inspected at regular intervals, and also where any exceptional circumstances have occurred that are liable to jeopardise the safety of the equipment. These inspections are important in ensuring that the equipment can continue to be used safely and that any deterioration is detected and remedied before it results in unacceptable risks. A competent person should determine the nature, frequency and extent of any inspection, taking account of such factors as the type of equipment, how and where it is used, and the likelihood of deterioration. Periods between inspections should be chosen on the basis of risk assessment and should be reviewed in the light of experience.

What is included in a report of inspection?

A report of inspection should include:

1. The name and address of the person for whom the inspection was carried out.
2. The location of the work equipment inspected.
3. A description of the work equipment inspected.
4. The date and time of the inspection.
5. Details of any matter identified that could give rise to a risk to the safety or health of any employee.
6. Details of any action taken as a result of any matter identified in paragraph
7. Details of any further action considered necessary.
8. The name and position of the person making the report.

Training

Employee training is a key element to safe work platforms/trestles on site is employee training. Where appropriate, employee's should be adequately trained in relation to erection, use and dismantling of work platforms. Employees should be aware of the safe systems of work when working at height and they should understand the principles of fall prevention.

Supervision

A lack of adequate site supervision can lead to unsafe work platforms being used on site. A strict checking and monitoring regime is needed on site. This regime should form part of the employee training and be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Where can I get further information?

The Guide to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007, Part 4: Work at Height, will provide you with more detailed information. It is available on our website at www.hsa.ie

The relevant legislation includes:

- ▲ The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007 Part 4: Work at Height
- ▲ The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005
- ▲ The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Construction) Regulations 2006