

Toolbox talks

Working at height

Background information:

Fall continue to be the biggest cause of fatal injury in Britain's workplaces, with 34 of 72 worker deaths in construction in 2007 / 2008 resulting from a fall from height. The causes of some of these are very simple e.g. un-tied ladders, incomplete edge protection, unprotected floor openings and fragile roofs. There is no distinction made between low and high falls so for all work at height, measures must be taken to prevent the risk of any fall that could cause injury.

Hazards:

- Incomplete scaffolding
- Unsecured ladders
- Falling objects
- Scaffold collapse.

Health and safety points:

Recent examples of accidents:

- Carpenter broke arm and jaw when falling 2.5m from pole ladder whilst first fixing to a large door frame
Cause: ladder unsuitable for work in hand and also unsecured.
Prevention: work platforms must be first option for works over 2m.
- Steel erector fell 4m whilst laying open grid metal deck flooring
Cause: no effective means of fall arrest provided at leading edge/no harness attachment facilities/method statement lacked detail
Prevention: where harnesses are prescribed as a means of fall prevention details of attachment point to be specified in method statement - consider use of inertia reels and running lines.
- Steel erector fell 3m whilst laying durbar metal deck flooring. Broke pelvis and wrist
Cause: no leading edge fall protection and laying plate out of sequence creating unprotected openings.
Prevention: ensure detailed sequence of work specified and followed ensure fall arrest system used.
- Welder fell 3.5m from scaffold tower onto his back. Fortunately sustained only severe bruising
Cause: failure to provide guard rails and toe-boards.
Prevention: ensure towers are provided with toe-boards and double guard-rails; ensure persons using towers are trained;
- Hierarchy of control measure when working at height
 - Avoid working at height if possible
 - Use an existing safe place of work
 - Provide work equipment to prevent falls
 - Mitigate distance and consequences of a fall
 - Instruction and training and/or other means.
- Never work off an unsecured ladder
- Ladders must be lashed or footed
- Scaffolding must have safe access onto a completely boarded platform which is fitted with guard-rails and toeboards fitted on all open edges
- If you have to work outside the guardrails even for seconds make sure you are wearing a full safety harness which is clipped to a secure anchor point
- Never leave openings in floors unprotected
- Protect openings in floors with guardrails and toeboards or cover over and fasten down
- Covers over holes must be strong enough to support the weight likely to be placed on it and fixed into position to prevent accidental dislodgement. Mark all covers "Hole below" or similar type of warning
- If you work off a mobile scaffold tower always lock the wheels, make sure guard-rails and toeboards are in position and the platform is fully boarded
- Never ride on the platform of a mobile tower scaffold. Move it by pushing it from the base
- Never place steps or ladders on the platform of any scaffold

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Management System

Toolbox talks

- All scaffolds to be marked as fit for access by competent system ie (Scafftag).

All the above injured people felt comfortable and secure in their work place. All four were in fact breaking the law and failing to comply with safety legislation. All underestimated the severity and injuries of a fall. All were beaten by gravity

Things to ask when working at height:

- Can I fall?
- What distance can I fall?
- What is the risk of me falling? (don't underestimate it!)
- If there is a risk of a fall, apply the following hierarchy:
 - Can the fall be avoided by using a platform and by providing guardrails and toeboards?
 - Can a different method be provided eg consider use of powered access equipment?
 - Could the distance of fall be reduced eg introduce safety nets or platforms beneath a leading edge?
 - Could the surface below a leading edge be made safe eg provide protective mushroom caps to protruding reinforcing?
 - Is the only remaining control the use of harness and fall arrest equipment?

Remember – if in doubt ask!

Question time:

- Q What must a ladder be before it is used?
- Q What four items must a scaffold have for it to be considered safe?
- Q What must you do with a harness for it to work?

Have you got any questions?

Record questions on the attendance sheet.

Safety reminder:

A safety harness will only save you when it is clipped onto a secure anchor point. Falls from height are the Industries biggest killer; No one is expecting you to take risks. If there are areas you have to work in where there is a risk of a fall, report it, do not ignore it, you have a legal duty to do so.

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