

## TOOLBOX TALK NO.29

### Working at height



Working at height remains one of the biggest causes of fatalities and major injuries. Common cases include falls from ladders and through fragile surfaces. 'Work at height' means work in any place where, if there were no precautions in place, a person could fall a distance liable to cause personal injury (for example a fall through a fragile roof).

#### What is work at height?

Work at height means work in any place where, if precautions are not taken, a person could fall a distance which is liable to cause personal injury. You are working at height if you:

- work above ground/floor level
- could fall from an edge, through an opening or fragile surface or
- could fall from ground level into an opening in a floor or a hole in the ground

Work at height does not include a slip or a trip on the level, as a fall from height has to involve a fall from one level to a lower level, nor does it include walking up and down a permanent staircase in a building.

#### What do I have to do?

You must make sure work is properly planned, supervised and carried out by competent people with the skills, knowledge and experience to do the job. You must use the right type of equipment for working at height as outlined in your RAMS.

Take a sensible approach when considering precautions. Low-risk, relatively straightforward tasks will require less effort when it comes to planning and there may be some low-risk situations where common sense tells you no particular simple precautions may be necessary.

#### Control measures

First assess the risks. Factors to weigh up include the height of the task, the duration and frequency, and the condition of the surface being worked on. Don't take a chance or simple risk – Speak and seek advice from your supervisor.

#### Before working at height work through these simple steps:

- avoid work at height where it's reasonably practicable to do so
- where work at height cannot be easily avoided, prevent falls using either an existing place of work that is already safe or the right type of equipment
- minimise the distance and consequences of a fall, by using the right type of equipment where the risk cannot be eliminated

For each step, always consider measures that protect everyone at risk (collective protection) before measures that only protect the individual (personal protection).

**Collective protection** is equipment that does not require the person working at height to act for it to be effective. Examples are permanent or temporary guardrails, scissor lifts and tower scaffolds.

**Personal protection** is equipment that requires the individual to act for it to be effective. An example is putting on a safety harness correctly and connecting it, with an energy-absorbing lanyard, to a suitable anchor point.

## Dos and don'ts of working at height

### Do....

- ✓ as much work as possible from the ground
- ✓ ensure workers can get safely to and from where they work at height
- ✓ ensure equipment is suitable, stable and strong enough for the job, maintained and checked regularly
- ✓ take precautions when working on or near fragile surfaces
- ✓ provide protection from falling objects
- ✓ consider emergency evacuation and rescue procedures

### Don't...

- ✗ Overload ladders – consider the equipment or materials workers are carrying before working at height. Check the pictogram or label on the ladder for information
- ✗ overreach on ladders or stepladders
- ✗ rest a ladder against weak upper surfaces, e.g. glazing or plastic gutters
- ✗ use ladders or stepladders for strenuous or heavy tasks, only use them for light work of short duration (a maximum of 30 minutes at a time)
- ✗ let anyone who is not competent (who doesn't have the skills, knowledge and experience to do the job) work at height

#### Questions:

What should be identified before work at height starts?

Above what height must edge protection, toe boards and guard rails be erected?