

Working at height.

Schools Safety Guide

Document information

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Introduction

Falls from height are one of the major causes of workplace fatalities. Each year there are hundreds of major injuries in the education sector due to falls from height. Some of these injuries are caused by falls from ladders (e.g. whilst carrying out maintenance or putting up stage lighting); however, many are caused by “low” falls (i.e. below two meters) and involve other activities such as putting up displays or standing on stools to close windows.

This guide provides a simple overview of working at height and outlines some of the safety issues you should be aware of.

Do you need to work at height?

The key to safe working at height is risk assessment and appropriate controls; however, before going down that route you should ask the question “do I need to work at height”?

Many activities, if well planned, can be done safely without the need for staff to work at height; for instance, you could use lightly weighted strings to pull displays up over beams and thus avoid the need for staff to work at height. Other examples include providing poles for staff to open high level windows and ensuring that regularly used resources are stored appropriately (i.e. not at height).

You may not be able to avoid some work at height, but you may still be able to minimise the risk to staff e.g. by preparing displays as much as possible prior to putting them up – that way work at height is kept to a minimum.

Equipment

If work at height cannot be avoided, then suitable access equipment should be provided. Typical equipment found in school includes kick stools (sometimes referred to as “elephants’ feet”) and low-level stepladders; in addition, the caretaker or premises manager may have sets of ladders and taller stepladders for tasks at greater height.

Any equipment provided must be appropriate for the workplace – domestic grade isn’t up to the job and should be avoided. In the case of ladders and stepladders, these should be Class I (industrial) or Class EN131 (commercial); Class III are for domestic use only and must not be used at work.

All equipment should be checked regularly, and those checks should be recorded. It is particularly important that all ladders and stepladders can be uniquely identified and that checks on them are recorded; a ladder register is ideal for this purpose.

Risk Assessment

Where work at height cannot be avoided, a risk assessment should be carried out and appropriate controls should be put in place to help reduce the risk. A model risk assessment for Working at Height is available, for schools to adapt and adopt.

Training

Any staff involved in work at height should receive appropriate training; even low-level work off a stepladder can be dangerous unless a few simple safety measures are followed.

Training is particularly important for those using sets of ladders or taller stepladders, where you need to ensure that staff are competent. The HSE guide for [safe use of ladders and stepladders](#) can be used as a "toolbox talk" training resource.

Further information

Additional information on risk assessment can be found in the Risk Assessment school safety guide (SSG).

Further information on working at height is available on HSE's website:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/index.htm>

Information relating to the selection & safe use of step ladders and ladders can also be found on the HSE website: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg455.pdf>