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Risk control

Working at Height Toolkit: Fall Protection



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Introduction

The Work at Height Regulations 2005¹ require that priority be given to equipment that provides collective protection as opposed to equipment that is 'personal' and protects only the person using it.

As an example, a safety harness and lanyard will protect one person, whereas a guardrail will potentially protect many people. Additionally, it should be remembered that in any hierarchy of health and safety controls, personal protective equipment (PPE) should be a last resort and should only be used when consideration of other physical controls has been exhausted.

When selecting equipment² to protect people from falling from height, consideration should be given to the following:

- The local conditions and risks to the safety of people at their place of work
- Access and egress requirements and distances involved
- The distance and consequences of any potential fall
- The duration and frequency of use of the work equipment
- Evacuation and rescue arrangements
- Additional risks posed by the installation, use, or removal of the work equipment

Mobile Access Tower Scaffolds (MATS)

Aluminium access tower scaffolds can provide a convenient means of achieving collective protection for some light-duty work at height tasks. They are mobile, lightweight and can usually be transported and erected with relative ease. It should be noted, however, that their lightweight nature means they are not suitable for heavy-duty work and maintain limitations in terms of the height they can reach.

As with other work at height, those erecting, modifying, and using MATS must be competent to do so.

The UK's primary competence scheme is administered and operated by PASMA³ – the Prefabricated Access Suppliers and Manufacturers Association. Steps should be taken to ensure that all of those involved hold PASMA competence, or equivalent.

Podium Steps

Like mobile towers, podium steps are mobile, lightweight and can usually be transported and erected with relative ease, however, they are only suitable for low-level access requirements.

Podium steps are preferred to stepladders in most circumstances as they provide a working platform that is fitted with guardrails, thereby offering collective protection, and they allow the user to turn and work in any direction.

As with other equipment for work at height, training for users must be provided and this can be based on the instructions for use, provided by the manufacturer or supplier and would follow a series of basic safety rules:

- Only use steps indoors or on solid ground
- Ensure pre-use checks are conducted and that users know what to look for
- Ensure the work area is free from other hazards prior to commencement.
- Never overreach
- Never exceed the safe loading capacity of the equipment
- Never make running repairs to podium steps
- Never remove any components while the equipment is in use
- Never attempt to pull the platform along when you are standing on it
- If the step is fitted with wheels, ensure they are locked when the equipment is in use

Mobile Elevating Work Platforms (MEWPS)

Mobile elevating work platforms can provide access to significant heights, and they offer a practical and often cost-effective alternative to other means of access. They come in many different forms and can also offer reach into areas that would not otherwise be possible.

The most recognised form of competence for MEWP users is operated by IPAF⁴ – the International Powered Access Federation. Training course duration runs from half a day to three days, depending upon the type of machine involved and those successfully completing their training will receive an IPAF PAL (Powered Access License) card.

There are many safety factors to consider for MEWP planning and operation, and therefore it is essential that key safety considerations are made prior to the work starting. Consideration must be given to the six main hazards associated with MEWP use:

- **Entrapment** – people have been killed by being trapped between a MEWP and an adjacent structure
- **Overtipping** – this can result in operators being thrown from the basket

- **Falling** – people working in the basket can fall and objects falling from height causing injury
- **Collision** – The MEWP may collide with pedestrians, overhead cables, or nearby vehicles
- **Terrain** – using MEWPs on unsuitable ground conditions can result in operators being thrown from the basket or overturning
- **Overhead power lines** – working near or contact with power lines causing death and severe injury

Any preventative measures should save time and money, through less waste, less cleaning, and fewer falls.

Rescue

Rescue must be considered at the planning stage for all work at height activity, and a rescue plan should be drawn up that clearly describes the methods of executing a rescue for any casualties. It is not acceptable to rely totally on the emergency services to conduct a rescue and local arrangements must be made.

The complexity of a rescue plan will match the complexity of the work that is being conducted and, in most cases, rescue plans are simple. However, for work at height that is more complex in nature, it will sometimes be the case that specialist rescue equipment and training is required¹.

References

1. Work at Height Regulations 2005. Available here: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2005/735/contents/made>
2. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. Available here: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1999/3242/made>
3. Prefabricated Access Suppliers' and Manufacturers' Association. Available here: <https://pasma.co.uk/>
4. The International Powered Access Federation. Available here: <https://www.ipaf.org/en-gb>

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Further information

For access to further RMP Resources you may find helpful in reducing your organisation's cost of risk, please access the RMP Resources or RMP Articles pages on our website. To join the debate follow us on our LinkedIn page.

Get in touch

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