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Risk control

Working at Height Toolkit: Scaffolding



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Working at Height Toolkit: Scaffolding

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.

Scaffolding comes in several forms, and it offers the benefit of providing collective fall protection at the same time as providing a platform for conducting work at height.

There are three main types of scaffolding, and these are:

- Traditional tube and fitting scaffolding
- System scaffolding
- Lightweight mobile access towers (MAT)

Tube and fitting scaffolding can be constructed to suit work of any nature, from small access towers to large loading gantries, whereas mobile access towers are used for lightweight tasks and can be constructed and adapted by those using them, subject to receiving the correct training.

The key standards that apply to scaffolding are BS EN 1281¹ and the Work at Height Regulations 2005. These standards dictate general safety requirements, and these are supplemented by industry guidance which specify good practice and provide more detail on specific areas.

Industry guidance is often viewed by HSE as the level to which standards should be achieved.

For tube and fitting scaffold, the National Access and Scaffolding Confederation produce a large library of freely downloadable guidance² and many of these standards can also be applied in general terms to system scaffolding.

Guidance for system scaffolding is produced by the manufacturer of each system, while guidance for the construction and use of mobile access tower scaffolds is produced by the manufacturer and by the Prefabricated Access Suppliers' and Manufacturers' Association³ (PASMA).

Scaffolding Design

The Work at Height Regulations 2005 require that all scaffolds be designed unless they are constructed in accordance with a recognised standard configuration. The NASC publication 'TG20' (technical guidance), provides standard design information for a limited number of basic scaffolds, and this comes in the form of TG20 compliance sheets. Any scaffolds constructed outside the specification of TG20 must be subject to design by calculation by a competent Engineer.

Mobile access towers and system scaffolds should be constructed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and if this is not possible, they should be designed by a competent Engineer in the same way as would be required for a tube and fitting scaffold.

All scaffolding must be erected, dismantled, and altered in a safe manner. This can be achieved by following National Access and Scaffolding Confederation (NASC) Safety Guidance SG4 'Preventing falls in scaffolding operations'⁴ or by following similar guidance provided by the manufacturers of system scaffolding.

Guardrails and Toe Boards

All working platforms from which a fall from height is possible must be fitted with guardrails and toe boards to protect against falls and falling materials.

Key considerations:

- The primary guardrail should be at least 950 mm above the working platform and beneath this there must not be an unprotected gap exceeding 470mm
- Toe boards should be installed, and these should be 150mm high

Access and Egress

Access and egress for scaffolding is achieved by fixed ladders, or by stair towers.

Under no circumstances should scaffold users climb up or down the scaffolding using the framework, and they must not be expected to duck under guardrails to make their way onto an access ladder – the route to the scaffold from the access point must be unimpeded. This is most often achieved by using a self-closing gate at the point where the ladder meets the access point.

Ladders providing access to scaffolds must be secured and they must extend beyond the access point by 1m. If they do not extend by this length, an alternative handhold must be provided.

Scaffolding Stability

Scaffolding that is correctly specified, used appropriately and well-constructed can withstand the very harshest of conditions. It is imperative that scaffolds are stabilised to prevent overturning, and this is most often achieved by anchoring the scaffold to the structure to which it provides access. Requirements for anchoring the scaffold can be found in the TG20 compliance sheet, manufacturer's instructions for use, or in the bespoke design.

Some important points to remember about ensuring scaffolding stability:

- Ties must never be removed or adapted by anyone other than a qualified Scaffolder
- Excavation at the base of a scaffold must be well-planned and only done with authorisation
- Sheeting or sign boards must not be fixed to scaffolds unless doing so is authorised by an Engineer
- Scaffolding must never be overloaded. The safe loading limits, otherwise known as the scaffold 'duty' should be clearly displayed on the scaffold tag

Scaffold Inspections

A key part of ensuring the ongoing safety of any scaffold is inspection, with the Work at Height Regulations 2005, requiring that scaffolding inspections be conducted at periodic intervals including:

- Prior to use
- At intervals not exceeding seven days
- After any event which may have affected the scaffold's strength or stability
- After significant modification

Inspection must always be conducted by a competent person, and, in practical terms, this means someone who is a qualified Scaffolder or someone who holds a formal scaffold inspection qualification.

Competence of Scaffolders

The most widely recognised and accepted scheme for Scaffolders is operated by the Construction Industry Scaffolders' Record Scheme⁵ (CISRS), and this scheme is applicable to those that erect any type of scaffold. CISRS Scaffolder cards are issued with a five-year expiry date and are renewed by Scaffolders attending a two-day CPD course.

Those responsible for requesting scaffolds should ensure that Scaffolders' cards are current.

Using MATs

- ALWAYS ensure a risk assessment is completed for the task
- ALWAYS ensure those using MATs are competent
- ALWAYS ensure MATs are constructed and used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions

- ALWAYS inspect components before use
- ALWAYS check for overhead restrictions and power sources before moving a tower
- NEVER use towers on soft or uneven ground
- NEVER move a tower when the platform contains people or materials
- ALWAYS lock the castors before using a tower
- ALWAYS use the outriggers supplied

References

1. Work at Height Regulations 2005. Available here: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2005/735/contents/made>
2. National Access and Scaffolding Confederation Available here: <http://www.nasc.org.uk/>
3. Prefabricated Access Suppliers' and Manufacturers' Association Available here: <https://pasma.co.uk/>
4. SG4 'Preventing falls in scaffolding operations' National Access and Scaffolding Confederation Available here: <https://nasc.org.uk/product-category/health-and-safety-guidance/>
5. Construction Industry Scaffolders' Record Scheme. Available here: <https://cisrs.org.uk/>

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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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