

Working at Height: *Control the Risk*

The Work at Height Regulations 2005, hierarchy of controls, ladder safety, scaffold inspections, fall prevention and your right to refuse unsafe work.



Last reviewed: August 2026



HSE · WAH Regs 2005



England, Scotland and Wales

ukworkrights.co.uk

In Northern Ireland, similar duties come from Northern Ireland's own health and safety law. Contact HSENI (Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland), not the HSE.

Work at Height Regulations 2005

- **Working at height** means any place where a person could fall and injure themselves — including below ground level
- Employers must ensure work at height is properly **planned, supervised and carried out safely**
- Work at height must only be done when it **cannot be avoided**
- Falls from height remain the **single biggest cause** of workplace fatalities in the UK
- In 2025/26 there were 31 fatal falls from height in Great Britain (HSE)
- You must receive **training and instruction** before working at height
- You have the right to **refuse unsafe work at height** without fear of dismissal

▲ ANY HEIGHT COUNTS

The regulations apply to any height where a fall could cause injury — even a low platform or kerb. There is no minimum height threshold.

The right approach — in order

- 1 Avoid work at height altogether**
If the task can be done from the ground — do it from the ground. Extendable tools, drones, remote cameras. Always the first option.
- 2 Prevent falls — use collective protection**
Guard rails, barriers, scaffolding, MEWPs (cherry pickers). Protects everyone without relying on individual behaviour.
- 3 Minimise the effect of a fall**
Safety nets, airbags, harnesses and lanyards. Only used where collective protection is not reasonably practicable.
- 4 Ladders — last resort for short duration only**
Ladders are only appropriate for low-risk, short-duration work where other equipment isn't justified. Three points of contact at all times.

Using ladders safely

- Inspect before every use — check stiles, rungs and feet
- Secure the ladder at the top, or have someone foot it
- Maintain **three points of contact** at all times
- Do not carry loads that prevent three-point contact
- Lean angle **75° (1 out for every 4 up)**
- Never work off the top three rungs
- Step ladders must be fully open with the platform lock engaged
- Do not use a ladder in high winds
- Ladder must extend **1 metre above the landing point**

▲ LADDER MISUSE IS THE BIGGEST RISK

Most ladder accidents involve improper use — incorrect angle, overreaching, wet feet, wrong type for the task. Check before every use.

Frequently asked questions

Q Do I need a harness to use a ladder?

Not for short-duration ladder work where the ladder is properly secured and three-point contact is maintained. Harnesses are required for work on roofs, scaffolds, MEWPs and where collective protection (guardrails) is not in place.

Q Who can sign off scaffolding as safe?

Scaffolding must be inspected by a competent person before use, after alteration, and after any event likely to affect its stability. Inspections must be recorded. Only competent scaffolders (typically CISRS-carded) should erect or dismantle scaffold.

Q Can I refuse to work at height if I think it's unsafe?

Yes. Under the Employment Rights Act 1996, you are protected if you leave, or refuse to return to, work because of danger you reasonably believe to be serious and imminent. Report the concern to your supervisor or HSE. You cannot be dismissed or disciplined for this.

Q What are MEWPs?

Mobile Elevated Work Platforms — cherry pickers, scissor lifts, boom lifts. Operators must be trained and assessed as competent. Platforms must be inspected and have a current LOLER examination certificate.

Delivery notes & attendance record

Before you start

Falls from height remain the leading cause of UK workplace deaths. Most involve short falls from ladders and fragile surfaces, not high-rise work — make that point early.

Questions to ask the team

1. What work at height are we doing today, including anything under two metres?
2. Could any of it be done from the ground instead?
3. Who inspects our ladders and access equipment, and when was the last check?
4. Are there fragile surfaces here — roof lights, old roofing — that people might step on?

The law behind this talk

Work at Height Regulations 2005 (regs. 6 and 7 — avoid, prevent, minimise); Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER)

Employers must give workers comprehensible information, instruction and training on the risks they face — Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 s.2(2)(c) and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 reg. 10. Keep the record below as evidence that you did.

Attendance record

Topic

Working at Height: Control the Risk

Date

Site / location

Delivered by

Actions agreed

Next talk due

Attendees

Name

Signature

Use the Print handout button to print this record. General guidance only, not legal advice. This toolbox talk is generic material and is not a substitute for a suitable and sufficient risk assessment by a competent person. Employers remain responsible for their duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

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hse.gov.uk

ACAS

0300 123 1100

acas.org.uk

CITIZENS ADVICE

0800 144 8848

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