

A high-angle photograph of a worker in a white hard hat and an orange high-visibility vest standing on a red scissor lift. The worker is reaching up to adjust a metal beam in a large, dark industrial structure, possibly a barn or warehouse. The structure has a complex network of metal beams and supports. The floor is dark and appears to be made of concrete or asphalt. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows.

SAFETY FOCUS

WORKING AT HEIGHT

This guide aims to provide you with practical advice to prevent accidents when it comes to working at height to make your farm a safer place for you and your family, employees and any visitors

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The Law

The Work at Height Regulations 2005 covers all work activities where people could fall and be injured. Employers, the self-employed and others who have control over work at height all have duties. You must make sure work at height is properly planned, uses the correct equipment, is supervised and carried out by people who are competent to do the job.

Working from height without protection, only needs one mistake or lapse in concentration to result in death or serious injury. Last year seven people lost their lives as a result of a fall from height in farm work places and many more have suffered life changing injuries.

Avoid work at height

The best way to manage risk associated from working at height to carry out roof work or maintenance, is to avoid it altogether. Maintenance work should be carried out from the ground where possible. Consideration should be given to engineering solutions to help facilitate this.

Here are some examples of how to avoid the need to work at height:

- Build in extra lighting to reduce the need to replace light bulbs
- Replace incandescent and halogen light bulbs with long-life LED lights
- Use extending equipment where possible to carry out routine jobs such as gutter clearing
- Use equipment that can be folded to a low level for maintenance
- Fit low level filling points to machinery e.g. sprayers.

CASE STUDY

A farm worker was walking in the valley gutter of a roof. The gutter was narrow and he could not get his feet beside each other so had to move along with one foot on the nail line of the fragile roof sheets.

As he was cleaning and moving along the gutter, one of the sheets gave way and he fell 3 metres to the concrete floor below. He suffered head injuries and cuts to his feet. The farm estate was prosecuted for failing to take reasonable precautions to prevent a fall and was fined.

Use professional contractors

If you are unable to find an alternative solution to working at height, avoid doing the work yourself and use specialist contractors. Always use a professional competent contractor who has the knowledge, skills, equipment and experience to work safely at height on buildings.



Plan work

If roof work and work at height cannot be carried out using an engineered solution or by contractors, make sure the work is planned. Designate people with the right training, competence and equipment using appropriate access equipment such as a mobile elevating work platform (MEWP) or a properly constructed scaffold. Never go on to a fragile roof – work from below, or use a MEWP.

Use properly designed work platforms rather than ladders if you need to work at height. The best platforms to use are fully integrated and properly constructed MEWPs. They are designed for the task and don't need another person to control them which removes the risk of misunderstanding between the person doing the lifting and the person in charge of the machine.



Scaffolding

Using a properly designed and erected scaffold provides you with a safe working platform.

The scaffold should be on level, firm ground with baseplates and be properly braced and secured to the building or structure.

Scaffold boards should provide a full platform with no gaps and should not overlap. Guard rails and toe boards should be used along the outer edges of the structure to prevent people and tools falling from the scaffold.



Ladders

Only use ladders to work at height for short duration jobs such as painting a window. Use a tower scaffold or MEWP for more extensive work. Ladders must be suitable for the task, properly maintained and regularly checked for defects. Do not use ladders that are damaged.

Make sure the ladder you are using is securely placed on a level and firm footing, not leaning against any fragile surface, such as fibre cement gutters. You should secure the ladder in place and also leave a metre overlap at the top of the ladder to get on and off if you are using it to access roofs etc.

Tie the ladder to a stable structure using a suitable stability device to prevent it from slipping. Using a person to foot a ladder is the least effective of these methods and should only be used as a last resort.

CASE STUDY

A 56 year old farmer from Yorkshire died when he fell from a ladder. He was placing wooden boards on top of a water tank when he fell from the ladder to the concrete floor below.



Always use the correct equipment

Do not be tempted to use the wrong equipment – it could result in serious injury or worse. It is illegal to be lifted on the forks or bucket of a telehandler. A contractor with the right skills and equipment avoids the need to work at height.

Never use makeshift equipment such as grain buckets or pallets as these can result in serious injuries or death if the machine tips accidentally.

If a telehandler or similar with a man-cage type work platform is used it should only be used for short duration, non-routine work. Use a MEWP for planned work. Man cages must be properly secured to the machine and not simply held on with tines. A tilt lock will stop the platform being accidentally tilted tipping someone off.

Agree a method of communication between the person on the platform and the driver of the machines before work commences to avoid the risk of misunderstanding.

CASE STUDY

A HSE inspector witnessed a worker access a roof via a ladder and planks between pallets. The ladder, pallet and plank contraption was raised 4 metres off the ground by two forklift trucks. The farm Manager was on an unsecured ladder and a casual worker was working on an asbestos cement roof with no protection.

The investigation found that:

- No edge protection or other precautions were taken for working on or near fragile roofs
- The access arrangements were unsafe
- There was inadequate protection from asbestos
- The level of supervision was inadequate.

Enforcement notices were issued. The farmer was prosecuted and fined for failing to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, the health and safety of employees.

CASE STUDY

Two horticulture employees were cutting the top off a line of conifer trees using a bow saw when they shouted to the driver to lower them, but he selected forward gear instead of reverse. This caused the vehicle to move forward suddenly and the cage to fall almost three metres to the floor with the men still inside. The men sustained major injuries.

The company was prosecuted and fined for using a work platform that was not fastened properly to the machine and had no front edge protection. The company should have used a professional contractor with the right equipment for tree work.

CASE STUDY

An employee fractured his leg and pelvis after falling from and being crushed by an unsecured potato box that was being used as a work platform on the forks of a raised forklift truck.

The company were prosecuted for using an unsafe system of work, despite a safety cage being available on site. The company pleaded guilty and were fined.





Inspection of lifting equipment

Lifting equipment is regulated by the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 (LOLER). The law states that lifting equipment used to lift people must be inspected by a competent person once every six months. Normally this inspection would be carried out by a specialist, or engineer from your insurance company.

Maintenance

Avoid maintenance work at height on tractors and farm machines in the field. If the work can't be done from a safe place (usually detailed in the manual), return to the yard and use the right equipment. If you need to adjust something or fix a breakdown, make the machine safe by following Safe Stop:

1. **Hand brake on**
2. **Controls in neutral**
3. **Engine off**
4. **Key out**

Assess whether the job can be carried out from the ground and consider using long-handled tools.

Try to avoid climbing up on the vehicle. Fitting clean-down systems that can be operated at a low level can eliminate the need to work at height.

**Further advice on safe working at height
is available on the HSE website:**

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture/topics/falls.htm>
and from NFU CallFirst 0370 845 8458

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