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Lanesend Primary School

Working at Height Regulations Policy School Health and Safety Policy

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Reviewed By: Site Manager, Health and Safety Consultant
and Headteacher

Lanesend Primary

Working at Height Regulations Policy

Falls from height are the biggest single cause of fatal injuries and the second biggest cause of major injuries, caused by accidents at work. Each year around 50-60 fatalities and 4000 major injuries are caused by falls from height at work. Reducing this toll was one of the Health & Safety Executive's Priority Programmes, which aimed to reduce the incidence of fatal and major injuries by 10% over 10 years, from 1999/2000.

New Work at height regulations from 6 April 2005

These Regulations implement a European Union Directive on work at height. They also bring together all the legal requirements for work at height. The Regulations adopt a risk-based approach, ensuring that measures to be taken to comply with the law are proportionate to the risk involved. As far as possible, it will be sufficient to comply with the law if people follow existing "good practice" as embodied in industries' own codes of practice or guidance. Risk assessments will then essentially consist of comparing what is being done with what is accepted as good practice. If the "good practice" is being followed, that will normally be enough to comply with the law – if not, action should be taken to meet the standard. For those already doing what is necessary to comply fully with existing laws which apply to safe work at heights – for example, the Construction (Health, Safety and welfare) Regulations, the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations, or the Workplace Regulations – the Work at Height Regulations should require little more by way of compliance.

Where do the Regulations apply?

The Regulations apply to all work activities where there is a need to control a risk of falling a distance liable to cause personal injury. This is regardless of the work equipment being used, the duration of the work, or the height at which the work is being performed. It includes access to and egress from the place of work. Examples of where the Regulations will apply include:

- Working on a scaffold or from a mobile elevated work platform
- Working on the back of a lorry, e.g. sheeting a load
- Arboriculture and forestry work performed in trees
- Using cradles or ropes to gain access to parts of buildings
- Climbing permanent structures, such as gantries or telegraph poles
- Working close to an evacuation area or cellar opening, where someone could fall into it and injure themselves or others
- Work on staging or trestles, for example at a concert or for filming
- Using a ladder/step ladder or kick stool for shelf filling, window cleaning, or other maintenance tasks such as changing a light bulb

The risk assessment and action required to control risks from using a kick stool to collect books from a shelf should be simple (e.g. not overloading yourself, not overstretching etc). However, the action required for a construction project would involve significantly greater considerations and assessments.

Unlike previous legislation, such as the Construction (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations, the Regulations apply to work where there is a risk of falling from any height and not just work at 2 metres or more above ground level. Research carried out for the HAS showed that around 60% of all major injuries are caused by falls from heights below 2 metres.

The Regulations do not cover risk of falls from walking up and down permanent stairs, trips and slips on the level or activities carried out by individuals 'not at work', for example DIY at home.

What do the Regulations require?

There are three main steps to compliance:

1. If you can avoid the need to work at height then do so – with a little planning many activities can be conducted safely from the ground
2. Where you can't avoid working at height then you must take steps to prevent falls either by working from a safe place of work at height, or if this is not available, by selecting the most suitable equipment for working at height. You should take into consideration the risks and factors such as the duration of the work and the environment in which the equipment will be used
3. If there is any remaining risk of a fall you should take steps to mitigate the effect, for example by using fall arrest equipment

Risk assessment is the key to the proper planning and organisation of all work at height and should inform the selection and use of appropriate equipment.

Employers have duties to:

- Assess the risk to help decide how to work safely
- Follow the hierarchy for safe work at height – avoid, prevent, mitigate; and give collective measures priority
- Plan and organize the work properly, taking account of weather conditions and possible emergencies
- Make sure those working at height are competent
- Use appropriate work equipment
- Manage the risks from working on or around fragile surfaces and from falling objects
- Inspect and maintain work equipment and inspect the place where work at height will be carried out, including means of access or egress

There are also detailed requirements for places of work at height, guard rails, working platforms, scaffolding, fall-arrest devices, rope access techniques, ladders, scaffold inspection reporting. Much of this detail was previously contained in construction legislation or guidance representing "good practice".

Persons at work (employees, self-employed etc) have duties to:

- Report to their supervisor or manager, any activity or defect which is likely to endanger the safety of the employee or others

- Use any equipment or safety device provided to him/her for work at height, in accordance with any training and instructions given to him/her

These duties are not new – they are similar to employees’ duties in existing Management, Work Equipment and Personal Protective Equipment Regulations.

Every employer must ensure that no person engages in any activity, including organisation, planning and supervision, in relation to work at height or work equipment for use in such work unless he/she is competent to do so or, if being trained, is being supervised by a competent person.

Competence is a combination of appropriate practical and theoretical knowledge, training and experience, which collectively should enable a person to:

- Undertake safely their specified activity at their level of responsibility
- Understand fully any potential risks related to the work activity (tasks and equipment) in which they are engaged
- Detect any defects or omissions and recognise any implications for health and safety with the aim of specifying any remedial actions that may be required

What is the likely impact on the school’s activities?

The new Regulations apply to all work at height, not just construction work. However, many of the requirements – for example organisation and planning, risk assessment, inspection and maintenance of work equipment, training and instruction – are not new, and schools and offices will have arrangements in place for these. Existing risk assessments and codes for work at height should be reviewed to ensure that they comply with the Regulations.

The competence of staff who work at height should be assessed and additional training provided if necessary. This will include staff who plan and organise the work, as well as those carrying it out. Specific training should continue to be provided in selection and safe use of equipment for work at height e.g. ladders and tower scaffolds.

Contracts for work at height should include method statements that comply with the Regulations and any relevant industry “good practice”. Permits for work should be required for “higher risk” work at height, e.g. roof work and any work on fragile surfaces.

The use of ladders is now discouraged, except as a means of access or egress. The new Regulations do not “ban” other uses of ladders, but they can only be used where the risk of falls is low, the duration of work is short (e.g. less than 30 minutes), and the worksite is such that alternatives (e.g. tower scaffold or mobile elevated work platform) can’t be used. In future greater use must be made of alternatives to ladders.