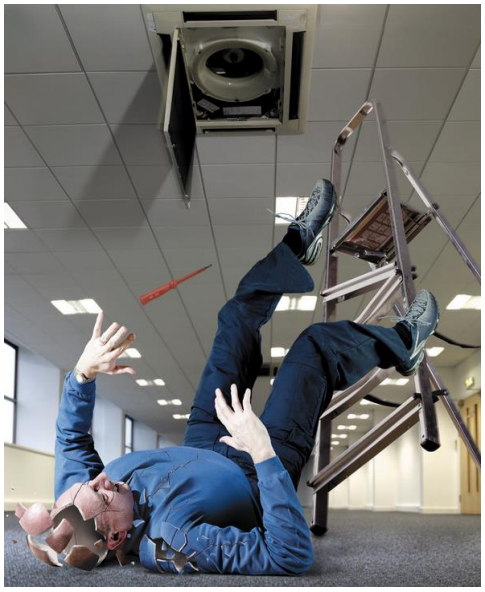
Charities
Safety
Group

Working at Height

Background



Work at height is a broad description of tasks that if insufficient precautions were in place, someone or something could fall and cause injury. Including above ground level work on ladders and roofs, but also includes situations when people or objects could fall into openings on the floor or ground.

It is a significant work related hazard. This is shown in HSE's statistics for 2014/15 when it was the accident type that caused the most fatalities. The most common causes are falls through fragile roofs or roof lights, e.g. cement sheets, corroded metal sheets, and other similar materials.

Work at height caused the most work related fatalities from accidents in 2014/15 Image: HSE

Legislation

There are 3 main pieces of legislation in this area. The Work at Height Regulations 2005 was introduced to try and help prevent deaths and injuries through falls from height. It places requirements on employers or people who control work at height to make sure it is properly planned, supervised and carried out by competent people, using the right equipment. This may seem daunting, but for lower risk and relatively straightforward tasks, less effort is needed in planning. The legislation also places duties on employees to take use work at height equipment in line with any training or instructions given, reporting issues with safety to their employers.

The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (HASAW) requires charities to ensure the health and safety of all workers and anyone who may be affected by their activities, so far as is reasonably practicable. This includes taking steps to control work at height activities. Workers have a duty not to put themselves or others in danger through their actions i.e. by reckless behaviour when working at height and not following any training or instructions given.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (MHSWR) requires charities to carry out risk assessments on their activities, reducing the risk from hazards to an acceptable level. This would include working at height.

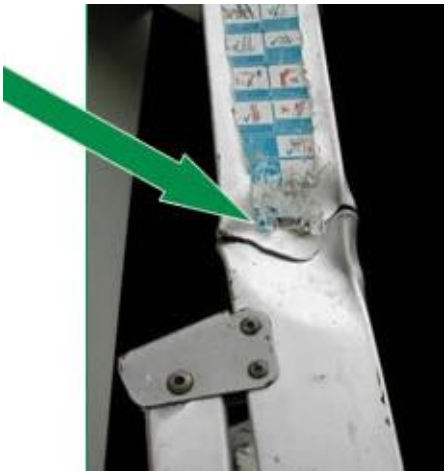
The most common cause of work at height fatality is roof work. Photo: HSE

The HSE have a dedicated webpage for work at height, which contains lots of useful information to help you reduce the risks. They also have a dedicated toolkit called WAIT (work at height and access information toolkit). On the WAIT Webpages there is guidance relating to various types of access equipment. There is also a specific online tool that you can work through to help decide what is the most appropriate type of access equipment to use for a work at height task.

Key Requirements

Key Requirement	**Content of requirement**
What do you actually have to do?	Put simply the legislation requires charities to make sure work is properly planned, supervised and carried out by competent people, using the most appropriate equipment for the task to be completed. The HSE on their dedicated webpages have also created a Work at height FAQs section which helps to answer most general queries. The following sections in this key requirements table explain how you can, make work at height safer, signposting to information where relevant. Some charities might find it helpful to put their approach on how to work at height safely into a policy or procedure
Planning work	A first step for safe work at height is effective 'planning', which is basically working out a safe way to do a task and putting in place the right precautions. Planning should also involve a risk assessment of the task to be completed. Some considerations when carrying out this planning include: • Could any weather conditions affect safety? • Is the area where it will take place safe? Or will additional precautions be needed to ensure this? • How can you stop materials or objects falling from height, or prevent people being in the vicinity of where they might fall? E.g. cordoning off areas where it is taking place. • If there is an emergency or something goes wrong, how will you rescue someone?  *The first step for safe work at height is effective planning* Image: 2020ProjectManagement.com
Selecting control measures and supervision	When considering what precautions are needed for safe work at height there are various factors to consider, these are: • the height of the task • the duration and frequency • the condition of the surface being worked on. There will also be certain low-risk situations where common sense tells you no particular precautions are necessary!

	Throughout the planning process and particularly when selecting suitable precautions for working at height, you need to consider its relevant hierarchy of control, which is: • **avoid** work at height where it's *reasonably practicable* to do so – e.g. by carrying out work at ground level using extendable tools. • where work at height cannot be easily avoided, take steps to **prevent** falls – e.g. using more suitable access equipment like 'tower scaffolds' instead of ladders. • **minimise** the distance and consequences of a fall, by using other suitable safety items like fall arrest systems, airbags, etc. When selecting control measures you should always consider measures that protect everyone at risk (collective protection) before measures that only protect the individual (personal protection). For example, collective protection measures include temporary guardrails, scissor lifts and tower scaffolds. Personal protection is equipment is less reliable as it requires the worker to use it properly for it to be effective, such as a harness or lanyard being used. To help ensure that relevant safety systems are followed appropriate levels of supervision is needed. The level of supervision needed will depend largely on the people involved, complexity of the task and risks. Higher risk tasks will need more intense supervision than lower risk.  *Control measures that protect everyone should be preferred to those that protect an individual* Photo: Windsor Safety Harness and Lanyard
Training and competence	Charities need to ensure that only people with sufficient 'skills, knowledge and experience' are made to carry out work at height tasks, therefore adequate amounts of information, instruction and training are provided when needed. For lower risk and short duration tasks, e.g. involving ladders, competence requirements could only involve ensuring workers receive instructions on how to use the equipment safely. As with most forms of training, it is preferable to keep good records of what has been given or demonstrated to a worker. When the risk is much greater, a higher level of competence is required. This could include situations similar to: • Design and installation of scaffolding • Use of mobile elevating work platform/scissor lifts/cherry pickers • Use of mobile/tower scaffolds In these instances formal courses, training and certification from appropriate trade associations or  *The level of competence (or training and instructions given) should be proportionate to the risks* Image: NYSAP

	previous work experience is a good way to show competence.
Selecting the right equipment	As there is such a wide variety of equipment available to use when working at height, (e.g. ladders, cherry pickers, mobile towers, scaffolding, etc), charities must ensure that they provide the most suitable equipment appropriate for the task to be completed. This should take account of: • The working conditions of where it will be used, environment and weather • How the task will be completed • Where the task will be completed • The frequency and duration of the task • The risks to the safety of everyone where the work equipment will be used • The manufacturer's instructions for use The HSE have produced a helpful specific online tool that can be used to assess which type of access equipment is most suitable for the task you are carrying out.
Ensuring equipment remains safe to use	To ensure that equipment used for work at height remains safe for use, it should be: • Maintained in line with (and used in accordance with) the manufacturers recommendations • Have ongoing visual checks to identify and resolve defects. These should be at suitable intervals relevant to the environment it is used in and what it is used for. • In the case of more complicated equipment, have the specialised periodic inspections required by other legislation, e.g. Statutory Thorough Examinations for lifting equipment, weekly inspections of scaffolding, etc.  *Equipment should be regularly checked to ensure it remains safe to use* Image: HSE Suitable records of ongoing visual checks carried out and any maintenance taking place should also be kept.

Ladders and step ladders	 *Ladders are still suitable for certain tasks* Image: HSE	One common misconception about work at height is that the use of ladders and step ladders are banned. This is not true. There are many cases when they are the most suitable access equipment for a job. These would include when the work to be carried out is light and of short duration. The HSE have produced a guidance leaflet on how to use ladders and step ladders safely.

Unique Challenges

When considering how to communicate and consult workers, there are some specific considerations needed based on typical charity settings, including:

- Volunteers by-passing safety precautions for working at height to help get the job done.
- Volunteers or employees using access equipment when they have not been shown how to use them safely.
- People bringing in access equipment of their own.