

WORK AT HEIGHT RESCUE



CLIENT'S RESPONSIBILITY?

There are over three million people in the UK who work at height as part of their job. With some types of work the risks are obvious, however for many people, work at height only forms an occasional or incidental part of their job (*access to a roof just twice a year is defined as a frequent activity!*) and as a result both they and their managers often overlook or fail to recognise the risks.

The problem is very serious - falling from height is the main cause of workplace fatalities so it is important to plan what to do in the event of an emergency. For example how will someone be rescued if they have an accident or fall ill while working at height?

In situations where a work at height activity involves a “fall arrest” situation, it is a legal requirement for the employer/building owner to provide the anchorage point, rescue plan, policy, training and equipment to complete a rescue. It is not the responsibility of the emergency services to conduct such a rescue.

Legislation

The Work at Height Regulations requires a rescue plan, policy and procedure to be in place for any work at height activity.

Health and Safety in Roofwork (HSG33) provides detailed guidance under sections 46-49 and the required training and refresher training (every six months) of those involved in a rescue procedure, see sections 242-245.

Click here for ‘Work at Height Rescue – Legislation and Guidance Reference’ which details specific sections relating Work at Height Rescue: <http://www.safesite.co.uk/downloads/legislation.php>

A full version of HSG 33 can be downloaded for free from the following link:
<http://books.hse.gov.uk/hse/public/saleproduct.jsf?catalogueCode=9780717662500>

Who is responsible?

Under the Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (Section 3), as well as the above legislation, you are responsible for the safety of those not in your direct employment.

This means that, for example, if you employ a company to maintain your lightning conductor or air conditioning units which are housed on your roof, it is your legal duty to ensure that they are safe when carrying out this work. This might simply mean installing an edge protection system on the roof or around the plant and equipment to prevent them from falling.

If this is not possible then a “fall restraint” system comprising anchorage points/horizontal lifeline and a lanyard might be required. It is essential when using any fall protection systems which involves the use of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) that it is supervised by a competent person and all those using the system have received adequate information, instruction and training.

In many instances “fall restraint” systems are misused due to the incorrect PPE combination being used to connect to the system i.e the harness, lanyard/ rope grab. This may occur due to the employer/building owner refusing to lend equipment to the contractors, which is obviously correct in terms of liability. In the case of a termed contractor it may be prudent for the employer/building owner to legally assign the required equipment combination to that contractor.

Quite simply if the incorrect length of restraint lanyard is used on a roof, a “fall restraint” system may suddenly become a “fall arrest” system, even though it has not been designed for such loadings. Also you must consider fragile roof lights and their vicinity in relation to the “fall restraint” system’s position.

In some cases a “fall arrest” system will be required and in these instances the employer/building owner is responsible for providing provide a rescue plan, policy and equipment so that everyone knows what to do if someone does fall while using the equipment and is left hanging in their harness.

Rescue Planning

It is essential that the employer/building owner has a rescue policy, plan and equipment in place ready to be deployed as well as the necessary trained and competent personnel to conduct a rescue.

When someone does fall people automatically think of calling the emergency services but in reality they might not be able to respond quickly or even have the right equipment to carry out the rescue. In fact it is recommended that the emergency services are **NOT** relied upon solely to perform the rescue. If someone does fall, the preferred means of rescue is to lower the casualty to a place of safety.

Equipment Options

The equipment required to carry out a rescue will need to be on site ready to be deployed by a competent & trained person/team. The equipment may be a MEWP, cherry picker or a specialist rescue kit, such as the Safesite Rescue Kit: www.safesite.co.uk/products/safesite_rescue_kit.php, which can be used to lower, raise, or in extreme situations, to abseil to the casualty so that they can then be lowered or raised to a suitable landing point. All those involved with the rescue will require training every six months as detailed in the Work at Height Regulations.

First Aid

During April 2008 the Health & Safety Laboratory held a stakeholder’s forum to discuss their research project, commissioned by the HSE, relating to “suspension trauma.”

It was concluded that there was no available data to confirm or deny that “suspension trauma” actually existed. In addition, there was no reported evidence to suggest that the W- position which a casualty may be placed in following a rescue, is any better or worse than the UK first aid guidance for the recovery of a person.

However it was recommended that any person hanging in a harness must be rescued as quickly as possible and that “suspension intolerance” would be a more appropriate term when training people or discussing the issue of rescue.

As a result of the above, the following standards are going to be revised in the future:-

- BS 7985:2002 Code of Practice for the use of rope access methods for industrial purposes.
- BS8437:2005 Code of practice for selection, use and maintenance of personal fall protection systems and equipment for use in the workplace.

Those providing training courses discussing the above will also need to amend their course to reflect the requirements within:-

- BS8454:2006 Code of practice for the delivery of training and education for work at height and rescue.

In the case of a rescue a competent first aider must be at ground level in order to assist with the casualty and to follow the standard UK first aid guidance for the recovery of a person.

Conclusion

Work at height solutions involving the use of PPE must be adequately supervised by a competent person. Arrangements for this supervision are to be provided by the employer/building owner. It is the employers/building owner's legal responsibility to provide a rescue policy, plan, equipment and required arrangements as appropriate.