

Health and Safety Policy Annex J: Working at height – operational guidance

Ladders (including step ladders)

Ladders and step ladders are regarded primarily as a means of access. They should only be used at workplaces for short periods of time and then only if the use of more suitable equipment is not justified because of low risk and when the residual risk is adequately controlled. It is generally safer to use a tower scaffold or a mobile elevated work platform (MEWP).

The use of ladders by employees is only permitted where the use of more suitable work equipment (such as tower scaffolds, podium steps, temporary stairs or MEWPs) is not appropriate and:

- the work can be reached without stretching
- the ladder can be secured to prevent slipping
- a good handhold is available (unless, in the case of a step ladder and when carrying a load, the maintenance of a handhold is not practicable).

All ladders must conform to BS EN 131 (the UK's version of EN 131), the single British & European product standard covering all types of portable ladders. Ladders are intended for domestic use and are not to be used at work.

Ladders must be in good condition and be inspected at least every 6 months by a competent person with records being kept. Managers and supervisors are responsible for implementing a programme of regular inspection of ladders under their control. There must also be a visual inspection before each use, which involves checking that:

- the stiles are not damaged, buckled or warped
- no rungs are cracked or missing
- safety feet or other safety devices are not missing.

Ladders (not step ladders) must be correctly angled (one out for every four up – that is, approximately 75 degrees to the horizontal). Where ladders are used as a means of access, they should extend approximately one metre above the access platform, unless some other adequate handhold is available.

Ladders must only be used on a firm, level surface and they should rest against a solid surface, not against fragile or other insecure materials such as plastic guttering or asbestos cement sheet. Ladders must be secured from falling; if a ladder cannot be secured by a physical fixture, then a second person must foot the ladder during use.

The top platform of a step ladder must not be used unless it is designed with handholds for that purpose.

Mobile elevated work platforms (MEWPs)

The use of MEWPs on council premises must be the subject of a prior risk assessment. The person operating the equipment must be trained and competent. The platform must be provided with guardrails, toe boards or other suitable barriers to prevent falls. MEWPs must be in good condition and used on firm and level ground.

MEWPs must be maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and thoroughly examined at six-monthly intervals by a competent person. Records of regular maintenance and thorough examination must be retained.

Roof safety systems

Latchway cable systems have been installed on some buildings for fall restraint as an alternative to provision of edge protection.

Property Services are responsible for ensuring that all systems are examined at intervals not exceeding 12 months and for arranging repair, replacement or full decommissioning and provision of alternative systems where equipment is found to be sub-standard.

Building managers are responsible for ensuring that the fall protection equipment (FPE) is supplied correctly for each installation and examined thoroughly at intervals not exceeding 12 months. This includes checking that no FPE has been in service for more than five years.

Property Services are responsible for arranging training for their staff who need access to the roof and for ensuring that no persons have access to the roof without a permit to work. Individuals must not be allowed to use roof safety systems unless they have received appropriate training. Contractors should provide a method statement with risk assessment before commencing work and proof of training before signing the permit to work.

Property Services are to ensure before use that visual inspections of FPE take place and these are recorded in the equipment log.