

■ Toolbox Talk: Working at Height

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Purpose

To reduce the risk of falls, injury or death when working at height by following safe working practices and legal duties under UK law.

Legal Duty

Under the Work at Height Regulations 2005, employers must ensure that work at height is properly planned, supervised, and carried out by competent persons.

What is 'Working at Height'?

Any work where a person could fall a distance liable to cause injury, including ladders, platforms, roofs, or fragile surfaces.

Hierarchy of Controls

1. Avoid work at height where possible
2. Prevent falls using suitable equipment
3. Minimise the distance and consequences of a fall

Before You Start

- Risk assess the job
- Check surfaces and weather
- Inspect equipment
- Use ladders only when necessary

Hazards and Safety Measures

- Use collective protection (e.g., guardrails) before PPE
- Extend ladders at least 1 metre above the step-off
- Don't overreach or overload ladders
- Avoid fragile surfaces

Good Practice for Window Cleaners

- Use water-fed poles from the ground
- Maintain 3 points of contact
- Use stabilisers where needed
- Wear grippy footwear
- Don't work at height alone if avoidable

Emergency Planning

Have a rescue plan. Ensure team members know what to do if someone falls. Keep communication devices nearby.

Discussion Points

1. What risks must be identified before working at height?
2. How can you prevent a fall when using a ladder?
3. What makes a surface fragile?
4. How far should a ladder extend above the step-off point?

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Disclaimer for WCA Members

This Toolbox Talk is a WCA-provided template and is intended for informational use only.

It does not replace a formal risk assessment or legal compliance with the Work at Height Regulations 2005. Each employer is responsible for reviewing and tailoring this document to meet their specific risks, team, and work environments. The WCA accepts no liability for injury, damage, or regulatory failure from the use or misuse of this material.

We recommend reviewing the following official guidance:

- HSE: Working at Height – <https://www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/index.htm>
- The Work at Height Regulations 2005 – <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/735/contents/made>
- HSE Safe Use of Ladders – <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg455.pdf>

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