Critical Risks – Working at height and depth

Working at height is inherently dangerous and if not managed properly can lead to serious injury or death. It’s not always the height you’re working at that matters – more than 50% of falls are from less than three metres. Working at height includes working on or around:

- Roofs
- Ladders
- Scaffolding (including mobile scaffolding)
- Working platforms (and elevating work platforms).

Working at depth:

Falls can still occur in holes, gaps or excavations on site.

Like all critical risks you should work through the process of: Identifying; Assessing; Managing - I AM safe.

You should create a site-specific safety plan for each worksite, which could include a task analysis or job safety environmental analysis for the critical risk of working at height and depth.
Here's a three-step process to controlling the risk of working at height:

**Step 1: IDENTIFY a safe approach**

Before working at height, ask yourself:

- Can you build it on the ground and lift it into position?
- Can you remove things to the ground to repair them?
- Can you pre-paint components or roofing materials on the ground?
- Assess if there are any holes or gaps in the ground that someone could fall into.

There may be other work you can carry out using long-handled tools from ground level.

**Step 2: ASSESS the danger of falling**

Before you start work at height, or depth, ensure the condition of the surface, for example the roof, is structurally safe to access, and consider the methods of access and exits.

There are several options to manage the critical risk of working at height.

**Step 3: MAKE SURE you’re safe and stable**

There are several options to make sure you’re safe and stable while working at height. These include:

- Using edge protection: Make sure the edge protection covers all exposed edges of a roof, including the perimeter of buildings – and also covers skylights, openings in the roof or open floor areas.
- Using a guard-railed work platform such as scaffold or elevating work platforms - scaffolding must be correctly erected, fit for purpose, safe and used in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions. Ensure it is isolated when it’s not in use.
- Use a total restraint system to prevent people being near height hazard.
- Use a fall arrest or work positioning system i.e. personal fall minimisation method. Use this in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions and workers using this must be formally trained and competent in using the system.
- Use safety nets or soft landing systems to minimise a fall to any worker at height. This is a fall minimisation method for a group of workers.
- Ensure any gaps, holes or excavations on site are either covered, guarded or marked to prevent falls.

A rescue plan should be in place in the event of an incident, or fall from height.

**Where do we get more information?**

The Safety Charter’s Critical Risk Height and Depth webpage has more information which is regularly updated. You can view it [here](#) or by clicking on Improve Health & Safety – Critical Risks – Height and Depth from the homepage.

You may also want to look at Safety Charter toolbox talk #9 Critical Risks Excavations.

If you want toolbox talks on the other 12 critical risks you can check them out [online](#).

**Employee issues raised:**

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**Date to be resolved by:**