

HS707 Working at Heights Guideline

Introduction

This document is designed to provide information for working safely at heights. The WHS Act 2011 and associated regulation provides specific requirements to manage the risk of falls.

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1. Scope

This guideline applies to any person performing an activity or task which is considered to be working at height.

2. Planning

2.1. Planning and Legislative Requirements

Planning the work should be conducted before any such activity or task at heights is performed. This planning should include:

- Any necessary approval
- Completion of a risk management form including, but not limited to:
 - individual job factors
 - the weather
 - height and location
 - people falling;
 - objects falling;
 - work occurring above or below other people;
 - structural adequacy and integrity of supports where work is occurring from or on.

Consideration should also be given to the area of work:

- on a fragile or potential unstable surface;
- on a sloping or slippery surface;
- in close proximity to an edge;
- in proximity of a hole, shaft or pit which is of sufficient dimensions for a person to fall in.

Legislative requirements must be addressed when determining the selection of preventative measures.

Further information can be found in the [Managing the Risk of Falls at Workplaces - Code of Practice](#)

2.1.1. Responsibility

Management and Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that risk management is carried out for activities involving working at heights and that Safe Work Procedures or guidelines are developed specifically for these activities. They are also responsible for ensuring that all identified Personal Protective Clothing and Equipment (PPCE) is available and in good order before work commences and that contractors and employees are trained in the correct use and any specific requirements of this PPCE.

Employees and contractors are responsible for using height safety equipment as instructed and only within the design parameters.

3. Procedure

3.1. Roof Safety

Any access to the roof of a University building is controlled by Facilities Management.

It is acknowledged that there are some pieces of plant located on buildings that relate to academic activities carried out within the buildings.

- Each of these activities is to be registered with the relevant Client Facilities Manager (CFM) and a protocol for gaining access to the roof is to be developed.
- No new activities may be commenced on any roof without the written permission of a senior manager from Facilities Management.
- A risk management form must be completed before commencing any type of work on roofs. This must include, but is not limited to:
 - Existing fall protection controls on the roof (e.g., handrails);
 - The nature of the work or activity to be conducted on the roof;
 - The skills, qualifications, and training of the person(s) that will be conducting the work or activity;
 - Weather conditions (e.g., rain, UV, reflected heat and glare);
 - Any building engineering services that may be affected (e.g., air conditioning intakes);
 - Work occurring above or below other people;
 - Objects falling;
 - Atmospheric contaminants from exhaust stacks;
 - Proximity to microwave towers.

3.2. Scaffolds

All scaffolds are to be erected by experienced and certified contractors at all times.

In addition, persons erecting scaffolding at UNSW must ensure:

- Safe access and egress to scaffolds;
- If any building structure or access will be affected by the erection of the scaffold, consideration must be given to the new arrangements for access etc to the building;
- Full edge protection is provided on each working platform and access platform;
- That access is restricted to authorised personnel only.

3.3. Elevating Work Platforms (EWP)

All EWP's must only be operated by competent persons fully trained in their use.

In addition, persons using EWPs at UNSW must ensure:

- All persons working in the EWP has a fall arrest device connected to a dedicated anchor point in the basket;
- The EWP is never used to gain access to an area. DO NOT leave the EWP while it is elevated;



- Never park the EWP on a slope;
- A barricade is placed around the EWP and work area.

3.4. Fall Arrest Equipment

Where a fall arrest device is being used, this equipment is required to have all anchorage points for the device inspected before first use and on a regular basis, so they are capable of supporting the loads. This inspection may only be conducted by a competent person.

Where the load-bearing capacity of anchor points is impaired, the anchor point is required to be taken out of service to prevent its use.

Only suitable equipment such as harness, safety line and other components shall be used in fall arrest systems. Where any part of the system shows signs of weakness and inability to perform the function as designed, it is not to be used.

Any person using fall arrest equipment is required to have training and be competent in its use and care. Where a fall arrest system is in use, an appropriate rescue plan is required in the event of a person falling.

3.5. Working from Ladders

Working from ladders greatly increases the chances of falling compared to other methods of working at heights, such as a work platform. It is important to realise that there are limits to the safe use of a ladder. Most accidents involving ladders occur because these limits are exceeded. As such working on ladders should be minimised and where appropriate alternate methods introduced.

Ladders are available in a variety of types, including portable and fixed.

When using portable ladders, the following points should be observed:

- The appropriate ladder should always be selected for the task (e.g., NEVER use a metal ladder for electrical work);
- All ladders should be adequately supported at the base and firmly attached where possible;
- A ladder should never be 'walked' by the person standing on the ladder;
- One ladder, one person, and it is recommended that one should always have three limbs on the ladder at all times;
- NEVER climb higher than the third rung from the top of the ladder;
- Wear fully enclosed slip resistant footwear when using ladders;
- Ladders must not be used on working platforms or be used to support a working platform;
- The slope of a ladder is important to ensuring the ladder won't fall backwards. Position the ladder using 4 in 1, e.g., for every 2m in height, the ladder should extend out from the vertical surface 0.5m.
- When the ladder is in position, it should be at least 1m beyond the height of the task. Or in the case required to get off or on the ladder, it should extend 1m above the level being accessed.
- Ensure the top of the ladder is secured to prevent falling.
- If being used in a thoroughfare or where the danger of a collision with the ladder exists, the area around the ladder must be barricaded off;
- When selecting a position to place a ladder it must not be placed over a doorway. If there is no other alternative, appropriate warning and prevention mechanisms must be introduced to prevent someone coming through the door while the ladder is in position.

3.6. Falling Objects

Objects falling from heights can place those working near or below at risk. Consideration must be made for plant, equipment or other objects require for use at heights.

Where working at height requires objects such as equipment the following shall be required:

- safe means of raising and lowering plant, materials and debris in the place of work;
- a secure physical barrier to prevent objects falling freely from buildings or structures in or in the vicinity of the place of work;
- measures to arrest the fall of objects;



- provision of appropriate personal protective equipment;
- barrier to close off the work area underneath or other means to prevent persons working or passing by underneath.

3.7. Exemptions

Exemptions are provided for the following:

- sporting or athletic activities, e.g., rock climbing or abseiling;
- performance of stunt work;
- acrobatics;
- theatrical performances.

4. Definitions

Competent Person: A person who has acquired through training, qualification, experience or a combination of these, the knowledge, and skills necessary for the task/s.

Risk Assessment: The overall process of estimating the magnitude of risk and deciding whether the risk is acceptable.

(Source: National Self-Insurer HS Audit Tool, User Guide & Workbook)

Fall means a fall by a person from one level to another.

Risk of a fall means a circumstance that exposes a worker while at work, or other person while at or in the vicinity of a workplace, to a risk of a fall that is reasonably likely to cause injury to the worker or other person. This includes circumstances in which the worker or other person is:

- in or on plant or a structure that is at an elevated level
- in or on plant that is being used to gain access to an elevated level
- in the vicinity of an opening through which a person could fall
- in the vicinity of an edge over which a person could fall
- on or in the vicinity of a surface through which a person could fall
- on or near the vicinity of a slippery, sloping, or unstable surface.

Appendix A: Acknowledgements

- University of Wollongong
- [Work Health and Safety Act 2011 \(nsw.gov.au\)](http://nsw.gov.au)
- [Work Health and Safety Regulation 2017 \(nsw.gov.au\)](http://nsw.gov.au)
- [List of codes of practice | SafeWork NSW](http://SafeWorkNSW)

Appendix B: Version Control

Version	Authorised by	Approval Date	Effective Date	Sections modified
1.1	Director, HR	1/3/2013	1/3/2013	Document created
1.2	Director, UNSW Safety and Sustainability	30 April 2014	30 April 2014	Reviewed for administrative updates
2.0	Director, UNSW Risk & Safety Management	8 August 2022	8 August 2022	Reviewed for administrative updates, template update and removed from Governance

Updates to this document

Any suggestions, recommendations or updates to this document should be emailed to safety@unsw.edu.au with the email header stating *HS707*.

