

Work at Height Regulations laid in Parliament

New regulations on work at height will come into force on 6 April 2005, the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) announced today.

The Work at Height Regulations 2005 consolidate previous legislation on working at height and will implement European Council Directive 2001/45/EC concerning minimum safety and health requirements for the use of equipment for work at height (the Temporary Work at Height Directive or TWAHD).

The Regulations will apply to all work at height where there is a risk of a fall liable to cause personal injury. They place duties on employers, the self-employed, and any person that controls the work of others to the extent of their control (for example facilities managers or building owners who may contract others to work at height). The Regulations will not apply to the provision of instruction or leadership in caving or climbing by way of sport, recreation, team building or similar activities.

The Regulations will require duty holders to ensure:

- all work at height is properly planned and organised;
- those involved in work at height are competent;
- the risks from work at height are assessed and appropriate work equipment is selected and used;
- the risks from fragile surfaces are properly controlled; and
- equipment for work at height is properly inspected and maintained.

The Regulations include Schedules giving requirements for existing places of work and means of access for work at height, collective fall prevention (e.g. guardrails and working platforms), collective fall arrest (e.g. nets, airbags etc), personal fall protection (e.g. work restraints, fall arrest and rope access) and ladders.

Elizabeth Gibby, Head of the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE's) Injuries Reduction Programme, said: "In 2003/4 falls from height accounted for 67 fatal accidents at work and nearly 4,000 major injuries. They remain the single biggest cause of workplace deaths and one of the biggest causes of major injury. Preventing falls from height is a central part of HSE's Injuries Reduction Programme and these Regulations will provide the cornerstone for this programme to improve standards for work at height and thereby reduce deaths and injuries.

"These Regulations set out a simple hierarchy for managing and selecting equipment for work at height. Duty holders must:

- avoid work at height where they can;

- use work equipment or other measures to prevent falls where they cannot avoid working at height; and
- where they cannot eliminate the risk of a fall, use work equipment or other measures to minimise the distance and consequences of a fall should one occur.”

She added: “The Regulations cover a wide range of industries and activities but we have developed some simple messages which we want to communicate to all industries. Our key messages are:

- those following good practice for work at height now should already be doing enough to comply with these Regulations;
- follow the risk assessments you have carried out for work at height activities and make sure all work at height is planned, organised and carried out by competent persons;
- follow the hierarchy for managing risks from work at height - take steps to avoid, prevent or reduce risks; and
- choose the right work equipment and select collective measures to prevent falls (such as guardrails and working platforms) before other measures which may only mitigate the distance and consequences of a fall (such as nets or airbags) or which may only provide personal protection from a fall.”

HSE will publish a simple guide to the Regulations. It will also promote the key messages with industry sectors and encourage them to review and develop their own specific guidance and advice for work at height.