



Work at height: Building refurbishment and maintenance

Be 'Height Aware'

If you are involved in building or plant maintenance projects...

You need to know that companies involved in building refurbishment or maintenance should adopt the principles of the new Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2007 (CDM). This is to make sure that you plan the work properly and take sensible measures so that workers are not exposed to risks during the work or in future cleaning and maintenance of the area. This is particularly true of work at height risks.

The CDM Regulations set the standard for the level of planning and organisation required on construction projects. HSE expects that through design and planning, you consider sensible measures to avoid work at height, both during the work and for future maintenance.

What should you do?

With a little thought, you can put simple things in place so that work at height is avoided during the work and for future maintenance. This will often mean you have saved time and money.

Assess the risks properly and act on the results of your assessment. This will help you decide what equipment you need for the work. Think about how workers will get to the work area, how much time they will need to spend working at height and how they will get down again. You will also need to think about what you will do if a worker falls or needs to be rescued.

Examples

If you are replacing lighting systems on a stairwell, can the new lights be installed on the walls rather than the ceiling? This means that work at height is reduced during the work and avoided completely when the bulbs need to be replaced or for future maintenance.

Using long-life light bulbs mean that work at height is reduced as the bulbs don't have to be changed so frequently – and energy costs are lower.

Installing 'tilt and turn' windows at higher levels mean that they can be cleaned from the inside avoiding the need for the window cleaner to use a ladder or cradle to clean the windows.

If you are installing new plant, think about the areas that need to be accessed for maintenance. Where you can, position the plant in a way that allows easy access for maintenance and minimises the need to work at height.

Why do it?

Remember, falls from height are the biggest workplace killer. A fall from height can happen to anyone. If you take simple, sensible measures, you can minimise the risk of your workers falling.

The most cost-effective approach to maintenance work is to involve key people at an early stage – the client, designer, and the main contractors – to discuss the work and the best way to do it. Think about where you will need to work at height and what you can do to avoid it, or reduce the time that workers need to use access equipment like ladders or scaffold towers.

What you can do now?

If you are a *landlord or building owner*

When you are getting refurbishment work done, always ask the planner or contractor to think about how they can avoid work at height during the work and how maintenance can be carried out without the need to work at height. Remember, if the work can be done from ground level it is safer and often quicker and cheaper as well.

If you are a *designer or architect*

When planning refurbishment work, think about what you can do to minimise the need to work at height, both during the work and when maintaining the area afterwards. A little extra thought could save a life.

If you are a *building contractor*

Look at the plans for the work and use the risk assessment process to think about where you might need to work at height and how you could do the work by avoiding work at height all together. Where you can't avoid work at height, follow the rest of the hierarchy. Your costs will be reduced if you don't have to set up access equipment.

If you are a *facilities or site manager*

Make sure that you get information on how to maintain the refurbished area safely before you take possession. Ask about work at height and how this can be avoided. If possible, get involved at an early stage, before the work starts, to make sure that maintenance is considered in the planning and design process. This can save you time, effort and worry in the long run.

If you are a *maintenance contractor*

Speak to the facilities or site manager about where you need to work at height and how this can be minimised. Use your risk assessment to point out the risk. When areas are refurbished, make sure that the designer knows about the risks and can take action so that you can avoid work at height in the future. You and your people could be at risk, it will cost you money if there is a fall.