Department of Labour
TE TARI MAHI

FACTSHEET
BE SAFE WORKING ON ROOFS

Everyone is responsible for preventing falls when working on a roof – the principal, the self-employed contractor and subcontractor, the employer and the worker.

Health and safety in the workplace starts when the decision is made to go ahead with a construction job. All aspects of working safely at height should be considered.

The Department of Labour's investigations into construction falls from height show:

- more than 50% of falls are from less than 3m
- approximately 70% of falls are from ladders and roofs

The cost of falls from height in construction has been estimated at $24 million a year. The financial and human cost is simply too high.

Preventing falls from height is a priority for the Department of Labour and it expects employers and contractors with staff working at height to actively manage this significant hazard.

Control the hazard – doing nothing is not an option

To stay safe when working at height, you need to ensure effective controls are in place to prevent people being harmed. To select the most effective controls, you must consider the following steps in sequence:

1. **Eliminate** the chances of a fall by doing as much of the preparation work as possible on the ground.
2. **Isolate** the worker from the risk of a fall by using scaffolds and edge protection to prevent the fall.
3. Only when these steps are not achievable should the risk be **minimised** by the use of a fall restraint or a fall protection system such as safety nets or airbags.

In some situations a combination of controls will be required to ensure safe work.

Remember doing nothing is not an option!



Checklist (✔) for working safely on a roof

- ○ Are workers trained or supervised to work on a roof safely?
- ○ Has a full hazard assessment been completed before work starts?
- ○ Is there safe access to roof areas?
- ○ Have existing roofs been thoroughly checked – pitch, trusses, rafters, purlins/sarking, translucent roofing material, mesh, corrosion and fixings?
- ○ Are workers protected from falling off roof edges?
- ○ Are workers protected from falling from incomplete roofs?
- ○ Are workers protected from falling through skylights and penetrations or other brittle roofing?
- ○ Are physical barriers/bump rails at least 2m from a fall hazard?
- ○ Are people below the work protected from the dangers of falling materials?
- ○ Do roof workers have appropriate footwear to prevent them slipping?
- ○ Are the weather conditions suitable for working on a roof?

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PREVENTING FALLS FROM HEIGHT

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Edge Protection

Edge protection should be used as a means of isolating workers from a fall where the hazard of working at height cannot be eliminated. This includes single-storey buildings and structures, even if less than 3m.

If this is not achievable, then using scaffolding or working in elevating work platforms or temporary work platforms are more acceptable alternatives.

Provide edge protection on all the exposed edges of a roof, including the perimeter of buildings, skylights or other fragile roof materials, and any openings in the roof. This also applies to openings and edges of floor areas.

Where there is the risk of workers falling through openings in a roof, the openings should be covered securely and designed to withstand any loads that may be applied to the cover.

Make sure there is a fall protection method that all people can use when working on the same roof.

Eliminate the hazard of a fall from a roof

- Work from the ground
- Work from inside where there is no possibility of a fall
- Prefabricate components at ground level or prior to installation
- Remove complete fixtures to ground level for maintenance (e.g. air conditioning units)
- Pre-paint fixture/roof prior to installation
- Install the aerial or plant on the side of the building or on the ground

When isolating the hazard of a fall from a roof you can consider:

- Scaffolding and mobile scaffolds
- Step platforms
- Perimeter guard railing
- Working in an elevating work platform
- Temporary edge protection
- Physical barriers – at least 2m from a fall hazard or to prevent access to a hazard
- Safety mesh (AS/NZS 4389) on top of purlins



Only when the above steps are not achievable then minimise the hazard of a fall from a roof by using:

- Total restraint systems
- Catch platforms and safety nets
- Air bag/bean bag systems
- Roof ladders and crawl boards
- Fall arrest systems
- Personal protective equipment

It's the law – doing nothing is not an option

Compliance with the legal requirements of the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992 (HSE Act) is the responsibility of anyone associated with working at height in a place of work. The law recognises the hierarchy of controls (eliminate, isolate, minimise) as an effective way of managing health and safety.

Prevent falls from height in your workplace. For more information visit www.dol.govt.nz/preventing-falls/ or call the Department of Labour 0800 20 90 20

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