Church Guidance Note

Working at height



Everyday tasks involving work at height are common in many churches and these can pose a risk of serious injury from falls. Thankfully, these are not common in a church, but where they do happen many have resulted in injuries that have been permanently disabling. Usually, these have involved falling from ladders and stepladders, or through fragile materials.

Falls can also occur from raised, open edges that are not adequately protected by handrails or other features (for example, balustrades). Sometimes, they can occur during roof work or where temporary work platforms are used (such as scaffolds and mobile access towers).

Legal requirements

Specific duties relating to the prevention of falls are detailed in the Work at Height Regulations. If you are an employer or have control of this work completed by others, you will need to comply with them. In controlling this work, you will only need to comply with the requirements to the extent of your control.

'Work at height' means any work in any place (including a place at or below ground level) from which a person could fall a distance liable to cause personal injury, and the duties extend to cover access to and from such a place (except by a staircase in a permanent workplace).

Broadly, the regulations require:

- The organising and planning of such work
- That persons are competent (or supervised by competent persons)

Risk Advice Line

Should you have any additional questions on this topic or other risk-related matters, as a valued Ecclesiastical customer you can contact us through our Risk Advice Line on

0345 600 7531
(Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm, excluding bank holidays)

and one of our in-house risk professionals will be able to assist.

Alternatively, you can email us at

risk.advice@ecclesiastical.com

and one of our experts will call you back within 24 hours.

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- Certain steps to be taken to avoid risk from work at height
- The correct selection and specification of work equipment
- The avoidance of risks from fragile surfaces, falling objects and dangerous areas
- The inspection of certain work equipment and of places of work at height.

Additional requirements might also apply in some circumstances (for example, where work equipment – such as a ladder – is used, the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations would also apply).

Other duties relating to the prevention of falls are set out in the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations. If you are an employer or have control of premises used as a workplace, you will need to comply with these also. The term 'workplace' is very broad and could include a church.

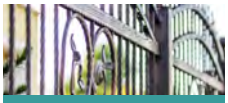
Beyond this, you also need to meet your common law duty of care, ensuring that any work at height is completed safely so as not to cause injury to another because you have acted negligently.

Hazards to look out for*

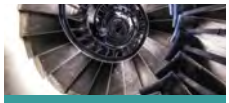
Internal



Tasks at height (for example, changing light bulbs, cleaning, painting and decorating, working in ringing and clock chambers, etc.)



Inadequate rails or barriers at raised edges (for example, in galleries and triforia)



Tops of staircases to rood lofts which have now been removed



Unprotected fragile roofing or ceiling material where work or access is required (including roof voids)



Contact with obstructions, structural elements or other architectural features

External



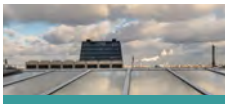
Tasks at height (for example, replacing security light bulbs, clearing leaves and vegetation from gutters and roofs, repairs and maintenance, etc.)



Low parapeting or castellations along the tops of external walls



Inadequate edge protection (such as, guard-rails and toe-boards) at roof level where work or access is required



Unprotected roof lights or other fragile roofing material where work or access is required



Damaged or worn masonry or other architectural features which might be relied upon to afford protection



Adverse weather making work at height unsafe (for example, high winds, snow and ice, etc.)

General



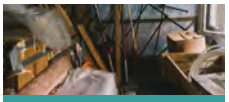
Access equipment unsuitable for the task in hand



Damaged ladders, stepladders or other access equipment



Unauthorised alterations to equipment



Ladders, stepladders or other access equipment stored poorly



Ladders, stepladders and other equipment incorrectly used (for example, not in accordance with manufacturer's instructions)

*This list is not exhaustive

Precautions you can take*

Typical precautions include:

- Ensuring that work is properly planned in advance
- Avoiding the need for work at height in the first place (for example, completing it from ground level)
- Using existing places at height (for example, galleries) to work from where these are suitable (that is, they have safe access, protected edges, etc.)
- Using suitable access equipment depending upon the nature and duration of the work (for example, scaffolding, access towers, ladders, stepladders, etc.)
- Providing adequate edge protection (such as handrails and toe boards) to working platforms and access routes at height
- Using personal fall protection (for example, harnesses)
- Using ladders only where their use is justified because of the low risk, and either the work is of short duration or there are existing features at your church that cannot be altered
- Providing safe access to places of work at height
- Making sure access equipment is properly used (for example, to prevent overloading or overreaching)
- Avoiding the need for work on or near fragile surfaces – including roof lights
- Protecting fragile surfaces (for example, by providing suitable platforms, coverings, guard rails, warning signs, etc.)
- Preventing materials or objects likely to cause injury from falling (for example, making sure they are suitably stored and will not be thrown or tipped from height)
- Using suitable access equipment near fragile surfaces (for example, roof ladders, crawling boards, etc.)
- Taking suitable precautions if work is required near overhead services and/or equipment
- Providing information and training on the safe use of access equipment
- Making sure no work at height is carried out when there are adverse weather conditions
- Making sure access equipment is periodically inspected for wear or damage and is properly maintained.

*This list is not exhaustive.

Making a start

Action	Guidance
1. Identify circumstances where work or access at height may be required. **Make a note of these.**	Where you are an employer, you will need to complete formal risk assessments. These notes should identify these circumstances for you.
2. Where work or access at height is required, check the precautions you have taken are adequate. If they are not, identify any additional ones that are needed. **Pay particular attention to the precautions for the safe use of ladders or stepladders.** **Make a note of the precautions in place and/or any additional ones that might be required. Also, note who will be responsible for taking them.**	Typical precautions are set out above. You can use this list to help decide if any further precautions are necessary. These will vary depending on your particular circumstances. Formal risk assessments should check the adequacy of any existing precautions, noting anything further that needs to be done. You can use the hazards and precautions list above to help you. Alternatively, you can use these with our church risk assessment template. Where practicable, it is better to avoid working at height (for example, completing the work from ground level using extendable tools). If this is not possible, you should prevent falls by using an existing place that is already safe (for example, stable with safe access and fixed edge protection) or the right type of equipment (for example, scaffolds, ladders, stepladders, etc.). If this isn't an option either, you should minimise the distance and consequences of a fall by using other equipment (for example, safety harnesses). If using ladders, you may need to show that this is justified. Normally, this would be because of the low risk associated with the work and either the work is of short duration or there are existing features at your church that cannot be altered. For most churches, tasks are usually low-risk (for example, lighting candles, painting, cleaning, fixing decorations, etc.) and of short duration (such as, staying up a leaning ladder or stepladder for less than 30 minutes at a time). Where this is not the case or where ladders cannot be used safely (that is, where the ladder will be level, stable and 'secured'), it is recommended that you consider alternative equipment.

Making a start

Action	Guidance
3. Ensure that the precautions you have identified are taken and remain in place for as long as is necessary. **Make a note of any checks or inspections you make to ensure these precautions are being taken or equipment remains safe.**	You may have to take special precautions and carry out inspections in certain circumstances (for example, where you use scaffolds, fall arrest systems, ladders, stepladders, etc.). You may also need other precautions to guard against falling materials or objects; prevent unauthorised access to work areas; ensure safe access; use lifting equipment; provide adequate lighting; ensure safety around overhead services and/or equipment; ensure the correct use of personal protective equipment, etc. If using ladders or stepladders, make sure they are the right type for the job and that those using them know how to do so safely.
4. Avoid the need for work on or near fragile surfaces – including roof lights.	Where this is not possible, identify and implement other precautions to prevent falls (for example, by providing suitable platforms, coverings, guard rails, roof ladders, crawling boards, warning signs, etc.).
5. Ensure that no work at height is carried out when weather conditions make the work or access unsafe.	
6. Ensure that employees and volunteers are provided with any necessary information, training or supervision if this is appropriate. **Make a note of any information or training that is provided, particularly in relation to the use of ladders and stepladders.**	The level of information and training required will vary depending on the nature of the work and your particular circumstances. If you have completed formal risk assessments, these will help you determine what will be necessary. For most churches, tasks will involve the use of ladders or stepladders. Here, making sure employees and volunteers receive simple instruction on how to use the equipment safely would be sufficient. However, where more sophisticated equipment (for example, a mobile access tower or scaffold) is to be used then more specialist training will be required.
7. Document your arrangements and responsibilities for managing work at height. **Review these where necessary, particularly if you suspect that they are no longer valid.** **Retain records of the notes you have made in steps one, two, three and six.**	If you have prepared a health and safety policy, record these as part of it. You can use our church health and safety policy template if you haven't done this and need one to comply with health and safety law.

Want to know more?

Other useful health and safety information is available at:

www.ecclesiastical.com/healthandsafety

Note: if you are in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey or the Isle of Man, then regional variations might apply. In this instance, you should check the guidance provided by the Enforcing Agency for your region. This will be freely available on their website.

Need to report an incident involving an injury?

If an incident occurs that may result in a claim for injury, please retain any accident investigation records, e.g. accident book entry, photos etc. and contact our specialist claims team on **0345 603 8381** (Monday to Friday 8am – 6pm) for advice. Where you have received correspondence about a claim being made against you, it is important that you notify us immediately and email a copy to our experts on **casualtyclaims@ecclesiastical.com**.

Policy cover queries

For queries about your policy cover, call our specialist church team on **0345 777 3322** (Monday to Friday 8am – 6pm, excluding bank holidays) or email us at **churches@ecclesiastical.com**.

Alternatively, please visit **www.ecclesiastical.com/church**.

This guidance is provided for information purposes and is general and educational in nature. It should not be used as a substitute for taking professional advice on specific issues and should not be taken as providing legal advice on any of the topics addressed.

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