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Accidents involving falls of people working at high levels are unfortunately a common problem in facilities management, where activities can involve working on ladders, scaffolding or roofs. Even falls from relatively low heights can cause serious injuries and business disruption.

The specific risks posed by working at height should be assessed as part of the organisation's overall health and safety risk assessment. The facilities manager should consider the risk of falls and take specific precautions where it is possible for anyone to fall a distance liable to cause personal injury.

Facilities managers and any person who controls the work of others have a legal duty to ensure that all work at height is properly planned and that those working at height are competent or supervised. The risks of working on or near fragile surfaces should be properly controlled and equipment for working at height must be properly inspected and maintained.

High level working should be avoided where possible and equipment must be used to prevent or minimise the consequences of falls where it cannot be avoided. Personal fall protection equipment to prevent or minimise the consequences of a fall may be used when preventive measures like scaffolds and cherry pickers, are not practical.

Those involved in work at height must be trained and competent and the place where work at height is to be carried out must be safe and accessible. Equipment for work at height must be appropriately inspected with risks from fragile surfaces and falling objects properly controlled and emergencies and rescue fully accounted for.

Where this is not possible the facility manager needs to ensure that work is carried out from a safe working platform. This may be an existing structure, such as a flat roof. If not, or if the existing structure isn't suitable a safe working platform, such as a mobile elevated work platform should be provided.

Any work on a roof is high risk and high safety standards are essential however long or short term the work is. It is important that risks are identified before the work starts and that the necessary equipment, appropriate precautions and systems of work are provided and implemented.

Where the risk of a fall cannot be eliminated, work equipment or other measures should be used that will minimise the distances and consequences of a fall should one occur such as nets and airbags. Anyone working with this type of equipment must have the correct training and be competent to set up and use it.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) publish a free Guide to the Work at Height Regulations INDG 401 which is available for download at www.hse.gov.uk