

Working on a High

There were 73 work-related fatalities in 2005. 10 of these fatalities were due to a fall from a height. The most common fatal incident types last year were 'trapped or crushed by falling object or machinery' (14 fatalities), 'struck by falling/moving/flying objects (12 fatalities), and falls from heights (10 fatalities). These three incident types accounted for 50% of all fatal incidents in 2005.

The long awaited work at height regulations were brought into Irish Law on the 26th June 2006. These new regulations – The Safety Health and Welfare at Work (Work at Height) Regulations 2006 (SI NO.318 of 2006) transpose various EU Directives, which concern the minimum safety and health standards for work at height.

The main areas covered in these new Regulations include the following: Organisation and planning, Weather conditions, Avoidance of risks from work at height, Selection of work equipment for work at height, Requirements for particular work equipment, Fragile surfaces, Falling objects, Danger areas and Inspection of work equipment.



The Regulations also comprise of the following seven Schedules:

Schedule 1: Requirements for existing places of work and means of access or egress at height.

Schedule 2: Requirements for guard-rails etc.

Schedule 3: Requirements for working platforms.

Schedule 4: Requirements for collective safeguards for arresting falls.

Schedule 5: Requirements for personal fall protection systems.

Schedule 6: Requirements for ladders.

Schedule 7: Particulars to be included in a report of inspection

In general, the idea behind the regulations is that, work is not to be carried out at a height, where it is reasonably practicable to carry out the work safely, otherwise than at a height. For example – assembly of roofing sections on the ground rather than full assembly at a height.

Where work at height is necessary, a safe method of work should be adopted with a preference for collective fall protection measures. While the Regulations apply to all places of work, there is an obvious significance for construction work, especially due to the fact that the Construction sector has a higher percentage (15%) of "falls from heights" incidents than any other sector

The specific issues that will impact on construction projects are:

- The “2 metre rule”, i.e. the requirement for handrail above 2 metres (old regulation 69(1) of the Construction Regulations), has been revoked and now at what height fall protection is required will depend on the risk assessment. The employer will have to decide if measures required by these regulations were not taken, could an employee fall a distance liable to cause personal injury regardless of the height.
- Work at height must be adequately planned and supervised taking into account the risk assessment.
- Collective fall protection measures are given priority – e.g. nets and safety decks etc. (it should be noted that this has always been the case but it is restated here.
- A mid rail is now required where there is a guardrail.
- Employers are required to protect employees from falling objects and to restrict unauthorised entry.
- Inspections are required for work equipment such as guardrails, working platforms etc. where used for construction work and it is possible to fall 2 metres or more, then equipment must be inspected in the previous 7 days.
- The schedules at the rear of the Regulations, outline in more detail the requirements for guardrails (Schedule 2), Working Platforms (Schedule 3 Pt. 1), Scaffolding (Schedule 3, Part 2), ladders (Schedule 6). It should be noted that these Regulations **DO NOT** ban the use of ladders at a place of work.



An official set of Guidelines has not yet been issued by the Health and Safety Authority, but will be done in the near future.