

TOP TEN GUIDANCE TIPS ON FALL PROTECTION

South African legislation is unique in the fact that it is one of the only countries that does not have regulations specifically for working at heights activities. As a result, we rely on subject matter experts to provide information and guidelines of good practice that can be followed to remain safe. Below we have listed our top ten guidance tips to improve working at heights to safeguard both workers and employers.

Tip 1: Competence of the fall protection planner is key.

The construction regulations of 2014 define a competent person as, "A person who has in respect of the work or task to be performed, the required knowledge, training, experience and where applicable, qualifications specific to that work or task."

It is critical that the designation and appointment of the fall protection planner is a competent individual who has the required knowledge, training and experience to prepare the fall protection plan.

Tip 2: Implementation of the fall protection plan is imperative; this is not a paper exercise!

Once a fall protection plan has been written, it needs to be implemented, amended where and when necessary and maintained as required.

A fall protection plan is a working document. In other words, it should be used as a guide and must be amended as per the site requirements and monitored and reviewed on regular intervals as per the needs of the organisation.

For example, during the course of a project a wire carrying electric current may become exposed and dangerous to those on site. Whilst this was not a concern at the commencement of the project, the fall protection plan would need to be updated to declare this a hazard, state how the area needs to be isolated and update the type of personal protective equipment that needs to be worn by any individual entering that area.

Beyond just having a living, breathing document that is updated and maintained, it is imperative that the plan is also easy to read and understand by **all** individuals on site and that these individuals make reference to the plan when working in their respective areas. Individuals working on site should also be encouraged to report potential hazards that may have occurred during the course of the project or overlooked in the beginning.

Tip 3: Adherence is not just another word...

The plan needs to be adhered to. There are many control measures within a health and safety system such as Planned Task Observations and inspections, however pro-active supervision might be the most hands-on approach. In fall protection the suggested optimal team compilation in a "fall arrest situation" is;

- **Basic Fall Arrest Technicians:** At least two individuals, depending on the scope and size of the job
- **Fall Arrest Technicians:** At least two individuals, depending on the scope and size of the job
- **Fall Arrest Supervisor:** At least one individual supervising a team of no more than 6 people.

When working at height one must never work alone and supervision should be non-negotiable.

Tip 4: Plan the sequence of your operation.

A method statement is a commonly used term for a detailed description of the operation mapped out in sequential steps. This method statement creates clarity on what needs to be done, what resources will be used and who will be involved.

Method statements apply to fall protection and can be used to minimise the risks that are identified in the fall protection plan.

Tip 5: Identify the hazards and calculate the risk.

After completing the method statement, one will have a good structure to base the risk assessment on. The process of risk assessment is to firstly identify the hazards, calculate the risk, and then to implement control measures to minimise or eliminate the risk.

The best control measures will not eliminate the hazard entirely, but in situations where this cannot be achieved, it is imperative

to minimise the risk and this should be stipulated in the plan and adhered to.

Tip 6: Consider the most practical access method.

There are seven basic access methods to consider when working at height. These have been set out by the Institute for Work at Height.

1. Fall Arrest and Fall Prevention (Fall Protection)
2. Rope Access
3. Mobile Elevated Work Platforms
4. Towers and Ladders
5. Scaffolding
6. Suspended Access Equipment
7. Falsework

When planning to work at height the first choice to make is which access method must be used. This may seem like a daunting task. Follow these basic guidelines when choosing which access method is best:

- What is the height you will have to reach and work at?
- What is the access to site? Will a mobile elevated work platform be able to access the work area?
- The duration of the activity
- The complexity of the work to be done
- The costs involved for the various access methods
- The associated hazards of the activity
- The competencies required to use the selected access method

Tip 7: Is the team medically fit to work at height?

All individuals working at height must have a valid medical certificate of fitness. This medical certificate can only be issued by a registered Occupational Health Practitioner.

It must specify the fitness to work at height and must include Annexure 3 as per the Construction Regulation 2014.

A medical certificate expires annually and records must be kept by the employer.

Tip 8: Is the team competent to work at height?

Work at height is a high risk practice and training of employees is not something to be taken lightly.

A good baseline to start from is to select the appropriate training provider. A training provider should;

- accredited by the relevant SETA for the relevant programme registered with that SETA.
- be able to provide proof of uploads to the National Learner Registration Database
- be registered and recognised with the Institute for Work at Height

There are various types of training courses per access method.

Choose the suitable programme that is required for the project at hand. A reputable training provider will have competent staff who will advise on the suitable training for the application should the fall protection planner have any doubts.

Tip 9: Is the equipment suitable and safe to use?

Everyone loves a bargain and in tough economic times, businesses are always looking for ways to cut costs. However, when non-compliant or incorrect equipment is used when working at height, the result may be the loss of a life.

Make sure you select equipment that conforms to a manufacturing standard and is suitable for your scope of work. Personal Protective Equipment such as your harness, lanyard and helmet should be inspected at regular intervals not exceeding 3 months and this inspection must be documented.

This equipment should also be maintained and well looked after. Every manufacturer should provide care and maintenance instructions for each piece of fall arrest equipment that is sold.

You also need to consider the care, inspection and maintenance of the "system of work". This could be the scaffold structure, the anchor point, lifeline or ladder you will be working on. Be sure that you have factored in this very important aspect when planning to work at height.

Tip 10: What if someone should fall?

While steps 1-9 are there to ensure there are no falls while working at height, we understand that everyone is human and mistakes can happen. If a fall does occur, one needs to be prepared to rescue the victim.

A well formulated rescue plan, specific to the work site, must be present in the protection plan. When writing the rescue plan you must consider the following;

- The method for the rescue including the procedure leading up to the rescue and what to do with the victim after they has been rescued.
- The personnel and their competence to perform a rescue. It is highly recommended that those who are tasked with performing a rescue are sent on refresher courses at least twice a year, if not more. Rescues are a technical procedure that is only worsened by the rush of adrenaline and panic, and it is imperative that they are performed in as short a time period as possible.
- The equipment you will need to perform a successful rescue operation.