

WORKING AT HEIGHTS, FALL PROTECTION & LADDER SAFETY



Working at heights presents serious risks—one misstep can mean a life-changing injury or worse. That is why every precaution, no matter how small, is critical when it comes to preventing falls. According to the Federated Employers' Mutual Assurance Company (FEM) 2024 statistics, falls from different levels account for 10,2% of all workplace accidents (Federated Employer's Assurance Mutual Comp, 2024; Federated Employer's Assurance Mutual Comp, 2024).

Working at heights refers to any situation where an employee is exposed to the risk of falling from an elevated position, e.g. such as rooftops, scaffolding or ladders, and is governed by several key pieces of health and safety legislation.

What are the responsibilities of an Employer regarding workplace injuries?

In accordance with *section 8 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993* ('the Act'), employers are required to provide a workplace and work systems that are, as far as reasonably practicable, safe and free from harm. This includes the implementation of control measures aligned with a professionally developed Fall Protection Plan. These controls must be effectively implemented and the plan should be continuously monitored to ensure ongoing compliance and safety. Employers should ensure that the Fall Protection Plan includes, among other measures, the following:

- Need for safety harnesses;
- Guard rails and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE);
- Employee training requirements;
- Monitoring of safety protocols and equipment usage.

What are the responsibilities of Employees?

Section 14 of the Act states that, among other requirements, employees are responsible for their own safety as well as the safety of others. It further emphasises that employees should follow all instructions given to them by the employer in the interest of health and safety (Lexis Nexis, 2021).

This means that employees are required to implement all controls outlined in the *Fall Protection Plan*. If an employee fails to comply with these controls, work must be stopped immediately and appropriate corrective actions taken. A Planned Task Observation (PTO) can assist in monitoring adherence to the plan.

Aids to assist in monitoring of the Fall Protection Plan

There are several methods for monitoring the implementation of the Fall Protection Plan. As previously mentioned, a documented PTO can help identify shortcomings in the plan, training, or equipment. Daily pre-use checklists are essential tools to ensure that the equipment is used and remained in good condition, in accordance with sections 10, 16, 17 and 18 of the Construction Regulations. Regular working-at-heights training, conducted by an accredited training provider, along with daily Safety Task Instructions that address the associated risks and control measures, is not only a legal requirement but also a cost-saving measure. This was explored in one of our previous blogs, *Understanding the Risks of Poor Disaster Management Planning*. Maintaining comprehensive records of all training within the safety file also supports the identification of any additional training needs.

How to develop a Fall Protection Plan

Our *OHS Consultants* assist with the development and implementation of a Fall Protection Plan to ensure workplace safety and compliance. Our support extends to essential workplace safety measures, including the drafting of an *Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) policy*. Our team stays continuously updated on industry developments, legislative changes, and best practices to help our clients remain compliant and maintain the highest safety standards.

Conclusion

Although activities such as using a ladder or step stool may seem straightforward, statistics show they are not always safe. Implementing a well-structured Fall Protection Plan offers several key benefits when fully and consistently applied.

Benefits include the following:

- **Injury prevention:** A properly implemented Fall Protection Plan significantly reduces the risk of workplace accidents and injuries.
- **Promotion of a safety culture:** Such a plan fosters a strong safety culture within the organisation, reinforcing safe practices at all levels.
- **Improved productivity and morale:** Employees who feel safe are more focused and productive, which in turn enhances morale and contributes positively to the company's reputation.
- **Regulatory compliance:** A Fall Protection Plan ensures compliance with health and safety regulations, protecting both the company and its employees.
- **Cost reduction:** Adherence to proper safety procedures can help lower the costs associated with workplace incidents and injuries.
- **Enhanced employee confidence:** When employees feel safe, they are more engaged and perform better in their roles.

*SERR Synergy assists businesses with **Occupational Health and Safety compliance** through the development and drafting of the necessary Health and Safety compliance policies, documentation, training, and support relating to information, e.g. working at heights. Our team of OHS Professionals is available to assist and guide clients towards OHS compliance.*

About the Author

Jennifer Christie joined SERR Synergy's Durban Branch in June 2024 and was appointed to the position of OHS Advisor. She holds several certificates, including MechTrac, HIRA, HazChem, Incident and Accident Investigator, Legal Liability, COIDA, First Aid Level 2, and Evacuation Warden. She assists clients, guided by her experience in the Carnival Rides industry where she was part of the team inspecting and certifying the rides as safe. She also has experience in the Crane industry, assisting with Risk Assessments, Inspections, and Certifications of all lifting and tackle equipment.

Bibliography / Sources:

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