

Preventing Falls While Working at Height

Purpose

Staff often work above ground level to perform maintenance tasks, such as cleaning roof gutters, or to access high spaces, such as shelving or to hang student artwork or notices. Even if extreme care is taken to work safely, a fall from height typically results in serious injury.

The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide guidelines for working safely at heights.

Work Practices

Work practices should be planned to eliminate the need for a person to work at height, or if that is not practicable, to prevent a person falling. Examples of safety measures for undertaking work at height are presented below from most preferred to least preferred.

1. Eliminate the Need to Work at Height

Examples:

- For artwork display, using a rope (nylon is best) that can be lowered with pulleys so that artwork can be attached at ground level.
- Using a pruning saw with an extension handle to trim foliage while standing on the ground
- Using a brush with an extension handle and hose to clean building exterior
- Installing a barrier that prevents the accumulation of leaves and debris in roof gutters

2. Access Equipment and Devices with Guardrails

(Known as passive fall protection devices because they are designed to prevent falls and, after installation, require no ongoing alteration or adjustment by a person to prevent falls.)

Examples:

- Using a cherry picker or scissor lift to reach roof gutters to clean them
- Having a mobile scaffold erected to complete scheduled light bulb changes in an auditorium.

3. Using Ladders

Using a ladder that is appropriate for the type of job is a much safer option than standing on make-shift footholds and platforms, such as furniture or railings. However, incorrect ladder use is one of the most common causes of workplace falls and injuries while working at height. Please refer to:

- the fact sheet titled: [Ladder Safety](#); and
- the hazard alert titled: [School Staff Reaching Up to High Spaces: Risk of Falling](#).

Other Issues

Travel Restraint and Fall Arrest Systems

These systems require the user to wear a safety harness attached to a lanyard which, through a variety of hardware, is attached to an anchor point. Their purpose is to either prevent a person from reaching a point from which they could fall (ie. travel restraint system) or arrest the fall of a person once they have fallen a short distance (ie. fall arrest system). The requirements for the installation, maintenance and use of these systems are extremely onerous and consequently these systems are generally not suitable to be installed in schools.

If it is determined that it is necessary to install a travel restraint or fall arrest system, advice should be sought from the Brisbane Catholic Education Occupational Health and Safety Section.

Roof Access

There are many hazards associated with walking and working on roofs.

- Fragile roofing materials can fracture without warning causing a person to fall through the roofing material without the opportunity of saving themselves. Examples of fragile roofing may include: corrugated asbestos cement sheeting, translucent polycarbonate sheeting, skylights, and damaged areas
- Weather conditions may cause a slippery roof surface
- Steep roof pitch may cause a person to slide off the roof; and
- Working near the edge of the roof increases the risk of a fall.

Access to roofs should only occur for essential purposes and should be restricted to personnel who have been trained in roof access.



Need More Information?

Contact the Brisbane Catholic Education Occupational Health and Safety Section on tel: 38400574.