A toolbox talk on work at height in the cleaning industry - speakers notes

Background information and instructions for PowerPoint presentation.

If there is no access to projection equipment the presentation can be run from a laptop or printed and used.

The background

Working at height is a serious issue for many people working within the cleaning industry. The risk of a fall during cleaning activities can be significant and an accident can lead to serious and even fatal injuries. Falls from height are the most common cause of work related fatal accidents in the UK and a common cause of reported injuries to people working within the cleaning industry.

This talk covers the working at height issues most common in a general cleaning or similar environment. It can be delivered by a safety representative, supervisor, or manager.

It does not cover the more complex working at height activities such as using tower scaffolding, cradles, work using ropes and mobile elevating work platforms. If your work requires this type of equipment, users should be properly trained before starting work.

Instructions for giving the talk

- The PowerPoint slides are provided with ‘What to say’ notes to provide you with the script for your presentation.
- The slides also have further background notes containing additional information, which you may also want to use.
- The PowerPoint file also includes useful background information for each slide to help when making the presentation.
- Add your own notes to make the talk specific to your place of work. Use any local examples of good practice.
- Explain why managing of the risk of falls from height is important, for example it is can result in major or even fatal injuries.
- Encourage staff to ask questions and if you have any difficulties seek further advice from your manager, local HSE inspector or Environmental Health Officer (EHO).
- Encourage discussion and agree some actions as a result of the talk.
- Consider building on the information given in the talk by gathering further information from your manager, HSE website and other publications.
- Follow up points that have been raised after the talk has been given, e.g. a further session on types of equipment used, safe systems of work etc.
- Consider issuing a reminder card with the key points on it.

Before you start

The provision of information is only part of managing the risks of falls from height. Employers should have procedures in place to make sure that the risks from falls are properly controlled. This includes assessing the risk and introducing appropriate controls. Further information is available in HSE leaflets The Work at Height Regulations 2005; A brief Guide (INDG401(rev1)) (link) and the falls section of the falls from height section of the HSE website (link).

Using the talk

Not all the images or examples used in the talk may be relevant to how you work. Where this is the case, use examples from your own workforce. There may also be some risks that apply at your workplace that aren't included in the talk. Before you use the talk, check its contents against your own risk assessment and add any information that you think is necessary.

The person who delivers the talk should:

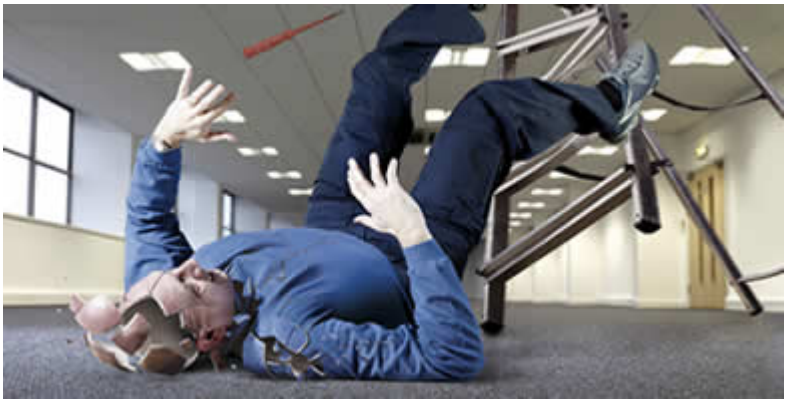
- be a good speaker;
- be committed to what they say;
- have a working knowledge of the cleaning activities; and
- have made themselves familiar with the talk to help to answer any questions that are asked.

It is important that whoever delivers it is comfortable with the language used. Where they are not, it should be modified to suit their own style of delivery. This may include making provision for people who don't speak English as a first language.

It is also good practice to keep a record of who has heard the talk and when.

SLIDE 1

A toolbox talk on falls from height in the cleaning industry



(Need to check about copyright and see if we could get screw driver changed for cleaning implement – if not need to get another image.)

What to say

Falls from height are the most common cause of work related fatal accidents in the UK and a common cause of reported injuries to people working within the cleaning industry. The risk of a fall during cleaning activities can be significant and an accident can lead to serious and even fatal injuries. Even a low fall can result in serious or fatal injuries.

This toolbox talk is designed for cleaning operatives and their supervisors. It covers the working at height issues most likely common in a general cleaning or similar environment.

This talk does not cover the more complex working at height activities such as using tower scaffolding, cradles, work using ropes and mobile elevating work platforms. If your work requires this type of equipment, users should be properly trained before starting work.

Notes

SLIDE 2

- Legal requirements
- Hazards and risk assessment
- Examples of avoiding work at height in general cleaning
- Examples of avoiding work at height in window cleaning
- Key safety issues whilst working at height
- Conclusion

What to say

This talk is split into 6 sections

- Legal requirements
- Hazards and risk assessment
- Examples of avoiding work at height in general cleaning
- Examples of avoiding work at height in window cleaning
- Key safety issues whilst working at height
- conclusion

Has anyone here fallen from something like a stepladder or chair, witnessed a colleague have a fall or been told about an accident?

Notes

Notes for speaker Discuss the circumstances of the accident including what caused the fall and how it could have been avoided.

SLIDE 3

What is work at Height?

- Work in any place, including a place at or below ground level, where a person could fall a distance and injure themselves or others.

IMAGE OF LESS OBVIOUS ACTIVITY

What to say

The Work at Height Regulations 2005 define work at height in detail. Putting it simply, work at height is work in any place, including a place at or below ground level, where a person could fall a distance and injure themselves or others.

Specific examples of work at height include:

- Working from a kick-step
- Working from a step ladder
- Working from a ladder
- Working next to an open window
-

What is the problem?

- Falling from height is the most common cause of workplace deaths. In 2007/08, 58 people died and nearly 3700 were seriously injured as a result of falling from height while at work.
- Approx 75% of serious injuries resulted from people falling from below head height.
- Falls from ladders and stepladders account for nearly one third of all fatal and major injuries and it is estimated they cost the UK economy £70 million each year. (Source – HSE, costs to society information)
- Falls from height is one of the main causes of accidents in the cleaning industry

Notes

The Work at Height Regulations 2005 define work at height as being work in any place, including a place at or below ground level, (including access and egress from such a place of work) where if measures required by the Regulations were not taken, a person could fall a distance liable to cause personal injury.

'Work' includes moving around at a place of work (except by a staircase in a permanent workplace) but not travel to or from a place of work. For instance, a cleaner on a stepladder would be working at height, but the regulations are not inclined to be applied to a mounted police officer on patrol.

Work near or adjacent to fragile materials will only be a work at height issue if you were to fall a distance onto them. Working on the level next to a pane of glass is not a fall from height even if you fell through it. You would have to fall a vertical distance before impact to count. Work near or adjacent to a fragile roof will need to be considered separately and is not covered in this talk.

SLIDE 4

What does the law say?

- avoid work at height;
- if it cant be avoided use work equipment or other measures to prevent falls
- where the risk of a fall can't be eliminated, use work equipment or other measures to minimise the distance and consequences of a fall

What to say

The Work at Height Regulations 2005 apply to everyone who works at height where there is a risk of a fall liable to cause injury. They place duties on:

- employers,
- the self-employed, and
- any person who controls the work of others (e.g. facilities managers or building owners who may contract others to work at height)

There is a hierarchy for managing and selecting equipment for work at height, this is:

1. avoid work at height where possible;
2. where work at height cannot avoided, use work equipment or other measures to prevent falls; and
3. where the risk of a fall cannot be eliminate, use work equipment or other measures to minimise the distance and consequences of a fall should one occur.

Notes

Possibly put in examples of avoidance, prevention and mitigation

SLIDE 5

Employers are required to:

- properly plan and organise work at height
- take account of weather conditions
- make sure that employees are trained and competent
- maintain and inspect equipment
- control the risks from fragile surfaces
- control the risks from falling objects

What to say

The Work at Height Regulations require employers to ensure that:

- all work at height is properly planned and organised;
- those involved in work at height are trained and competent;
- the place where work at height is done is safe;
- equipment for work at height is appropriately maintained and inspected;
- the risks from fragile surfaces are properly controlled; and
- the risks from falling objects are properly controlled.
- all work at height takes account of weather conditions that could endanger health and safety

Notes

SLIDE 6

Employees are required to:

- report any safety hazard
- use the equipment supplied properly, following any training and instructions given

IMAGE

What to say

The Work at Height Regulations also place responsibilities on Employees. Employees are required to:

- report any safety hazard;
- use the equipment supplied (including safety devices) properly, following any training and instructions (unless you think that would be unsafe, in which case you should seek further instructions before continuing).

Notes

SLIDE 7

Risk assessment – things to consider:

- The work activity
- The equipment to be used
- The duration of the work
- The location where the work activity is due to take place
- The working environment
- The condition and stability of work surfaces
- The physical capabilities of the individual
- Emergency plans and rescue

What to say

The Regulations are based on a risk assessment approach. When considering work at height, a risk assessment should be carried out. This should identify the hazards and the degree of risk, i.e. careful examination of what could cause harm to people as a result of the activity.

When carrying out the risk assessment, consideration should be given to:

- The work activity
- The equipment to be used
- The duration of the work
- The location where the work activity is due to take place, i.e. the presence of hazards such as overhead power lines, fragile roof lights, or risks associated with falling objects etc.
- The working environment, e.g. weather conditions, lighting.
- The condition and stability of work surfaces,
- The physical capabilities of the individual, e.g. pregnancy, vertigo, etc.
- Emergency plans and rescue

Where do you think these things could apply to your work?

Notes

Have discussion on how these apply to your workplace.

SLIDE 8

First Step

- avoid work at height if you can

Need to get other images of cleaning avoidance

What to say

In a general/office cleaning environment, there could be a significant amount of work at relatively low heights. This could include the cleaning of mirrors, partitions, ledges, window sills, light fittings, shelves and many more.

Remember the hierarchy:

- **The first step is to avoid work at height where you can**

Can anyone think of ways to avoid work at height?

Much of this work can be avoided through the use of long handled implements to enable work to take place from the ground. However, any long handled tools in use must be designed for the purpose.

Notes

SLIDE 9

Other things to consider

- Slips and Trips
- Manual Handling
- Other people
- Site specific hazards (e.g. overhead electrical cables)

What to say

There are other hazards that should not be forgotten - These include:

- Manual handling issues and note them on the risk assessments
- Slips and trips can be a risk with this type of activity as the user's focus will be on the area being cleaned. This should be considered in the risk assessment.
- Ensure that the tools do not protrude into walkways or become a hazard to other workers
- Ensure that the tools cannot come into contact with any overhead electrical cables

Notes

SLIDE 10

If work at height cannot be avoided

- Use the most appropriate equipment
- Have the right training
- Wear suitable footwear

What to say

Should work at height be unavoidable, then it will need to be conducted safely and using the appropriate work equipment.

- Office furniture was not designed to stand on, and cleaners should not therefore stand on chairs, desks or window sills to clean high surfaces.
- Work carried out on a ladder, step ladder or kick-step should be temporary and of no more than 30 minutes duration. You should use other more appropriate equipment if more than 30minutes, for example use a platform with a full guard rail, a scaffold tower or mobile elevated working platforms.
- Cleaners should wear suitable footwear for working, and not work at height in unsuitable shoes. This includes shoes with damaged or slippery soles. Shoes should provide a good grip.

Notes

SLIDE 11

Kick steps

- Only for short duration low level work
- Check before using

Need to get the right image of a kick stool

What to say

Kick steps should only be used for short duration low level work, such as dusting a high surface, and only when a long handled tool is not appropriate.
Before use they should be inspected for cracks, dents, slippery contamination or wear on the step surface, and damage to the castors and springs underneath. If the steps are damaged they should not be used and the damage reported to a supervisor.

When using a kick step……

- Place the kick step on a firm, flat surface, well away from any stairwells and open windows
- Beware of placing the kick step behind a door that might be opened, knocking the cleaner to the floor.
- Do not carry heavy weights while on a kick step
- Do not over reach – you should always keep both feet on the kick step

Notes

SLIDE 12

Step ladders

- Pre-use check
- Positioning
- Safe use

Figure 4a *Correct - three clear steps. Dont work any higher up this type of stepladder*

What to say

Stepladders and are commonly used for work at height. Each year on average 13 people die and a further 1200 are seriously injured at work as a result of falling from a ladder or step ladder. Many of these injuries are caused by inappropriate or incorrect use of the equipment.

Firstly we will consider stepladders. Stepladders may be suitable for short-duration tasks and work where bulkier equipment would create an additional hazard.

What do you think should be considered for the safe use of stepladders?

Pre-use check

- Check them before use
- Check the feet, stiles, rungs and any locking devices
- Don’t use defective equipment
- Make sure you are not going to overload the stepladder

Positioning

- Step-ladders should only be used on firm, level ground
- Check that there is enough space to open the stepladders and use any locking devices
- You should face the work activity

Safe use

- Step ladders should be fully spread and stable on the ground
- The work carried out should be short term, lasting no more than 30 minutes, and be light in nature, i.e. heavy items must not be carried.
- Always leave two clear steps on a step ladder, unless it is specially designed with safe hand holds on the steps.
- Step ladders are not designed for side loading- avoid any work that requires this
- Do not overreach

Notes

SLIDE 13

Ladders

- Pre-use check
- Positioning
- Safe use

Figure 6 *Incorrect - overreaching and failing to maintain three points of contact*

What to say

Now we are going to discuss ladders. Remember ladders and stepladders should only be used if the job cannot be done from the ground and if there are no safer ways of getting access.

The work carried out from a ladder must be short term, lasting no more than 30 minutes, and care should be taken that short duration high frequency work does not add up to over 30 minutes in total

What do you think should be considered for the safe use of ladders?

Pre-use check

- Check them before use
- Check the feet, stiles, rungs and any locking devices
- Don't use defective equipment

Positioning

- Ladders should only be used on firm, level ground
- Positioned at 75° or 1 in 4
- Ladders should face the work activity

Safe use

- Tie the top of the ladder wherever possible
- Use a ladder stability device- footing is the last resort
- Do not use a ladder if you have a medical condition that could affect your safety
- Do not climb past the fourth rung from the top of a ladder
- Work should be light in nature, i.e. heavy items must not be carried when using a ladder.
- Keep both hands on rungs when ascending and descending and one hand on the ladder when working
- If you need both hands for working consider using alternative appropriate equipment
- Avoid twisting and turning
- Do not over reach when working-if your belt is not within the stiles you are reaching too far and should reposition the ladder

Notes

If people are using step ladders and ladders then it is recommended that you run a separate session using the HSE publication - A toolbox talk on leaning ladder and stepladder safety (INDG403)

SLIDE 14

Example - avoiding work at height in window cleaning

- Telescopic poles
- Water-fed poles

What to say

Telescopic or water-fed pole systems are a safer alternative for working at height when cleaning windows with reasonable access.
They are both suitable for work at varying heights and can be used for work at commercial and residential properties. Avoiding the need to work at height is a great benefit but there are other considerations that need to be taken into account. Not all windows are suitable for cleaning using telescopic or water fed poles and other options should be used for these occasions.

Safe use of poles

- Always work in teams of two if the height being reached is greater than 20 feet. This enables staff to alternate the tasks and is the safest way to elevate the pole.
- Trolley systems allow access to work areas and reduce the tripping hazards caused by cable and hoses extended over a considerable distance.
- Always ensure clear signs are displayed at the entry to the work area indicating the hazards
- Ensure that vehicles and trolley systems are not left in the road or on footpaths in such a way they themselves become a hazard.
- Manual handling needs to be taken into consideration and included in the risk assessments
- Ensure that the poles do not protrude into footpaths and or roads
- Poles are unsuitable for use in extreme windy conditions due to the lack of control that is maintained
- Don’t work with poles in the vicinity of overhead cables.
- Ensure that water-fed pole systems are properly maintained. This should include -
    - Visual checks - looking for damage to the pole and its fittings such as any clamps, loose heads
    - monthly formal inspections that are documented
    - Regular replacements of filters to keep the water of a high quality and reduce the risk of legionella
- The vehicles that are used to transport the tanks and system should be fit for the purpose. The combined weight of a loaded tank should not exceed the vehicles payload.
- Tanks need to be secured in such a way to ensure the security of the load in transit including any situations involving emergency braking or during collisions.

Notes

Further information with regard to telescopic or water-fed pole systems can be obtained from the Federation of Window Cleaners (info@f-w-c.co.uk)

SLIDE 15

Key safety issues whilst working at height

- Selection of equipment
- Training
- Inspection and maintenance of equipment
- Safe use

What to say

To enable you to perform your work safely at each and every location it important that you;

- Do not do any work that you have not been trained to do
- Only use equipment that you have been trained to use
- Do not use any piece of equipment unless you have personally inspected it
- Do not use any lifting or lowering equipment unless it has a current thorough examination report,
- Report all faulty equipment to your line manager
- Avoid leaving any piece of access equipment erected and unattended, unless it can be secured and not interfered with; in any case inspect and re-check between shifts/breaks before re-using
- Plan what you will do in an emergency, or if someone falls
- Make sure all the people who will be doing the job have the right skills, experience and training to use the equipment safely and have been consulted about the right equipment to use.
- Inspect your kit - never use faulty equipment. If it is faulty, tag it, report it and return it for a replacement
- Take frequent breaks, especially when working from a ladder - do not work from a ladder for longer than 30 minutes
- If you have to use a ladder make sure you re-position as necessary to reduce the risk of an accident from over-reaching
- If you use a ladder always maintain three points of contact
- If you are hiring access equipment, inspect it, check certificates and make sure you know how to use it safely. This includes making sure the hirer provides proper instructions

Notes

SLIDE 16

What hazards should be considered when working at height

Photo

What to say

This toolbox talk has covered quite a bit of information. What hazards do you think might come up when assessing the risks from work at height?

Answers should include (discuss each one as they are suggested or prompt for ideas):

Fall from height	Manual handling	Fragile surfaces	Overhead power lines
Dropping or Falling objects	Inadequate edge protection	Uneven / obstructions on walking surface	Telecommunications Equipment
Extreme weather	Fatigue / Heat stress	Wet / Slippery floor	Overhead obstructions
Faulty access equipment	Vehicle movement	Soft/Loose ground	Misuse of PPE
Misuse of access equipment	Faulty eyebolts/wire restraint system	Pedestrians entering work areas	Faulty PPE

Notes

SLIDE 17

Conclusion

- Avoid where possible and
- Use common sense

What to say

Working safely means using common sense in the workplace. Avoid work at Height wherever possible, and certainly don't carry out work at height unless you have been appropriately trained taking into consideration the type of equipment and work activity.

Where cleaners are working at height the following should apply:

- a risk assessment should have been carried out before starting
- there should be a safe system of work
- cleaners should be made aware of the outcomes of risk assessments
- management should conduct periodic random unannounced site visits to check work activities
- operatives who work at height must be fit and have the capability to perform the work
- work outdoors should stop during adverse weather, e.g. excessive wind speeds
- consideration should be given to people working alone
- emergency rescue procedures should be in place
- means of communication should be available for use in the event of an emergency
- Make sure that everyone involved in working at height has the ability to do the work safely. Training may be needed. Some access equipment may require specialist training, eg a mobile elevating work platform (MEWP) or tower scaffolding.
- faulty access equipment must not be used and should be reported
- faulty PPE must not be used and should be reported
- sites should be checked for additional or temporary hazards prior to starting work

AVOID WORK AT HEIGHT WHEREVER POSSIBLE

Think about it - your work day is one third of your total day!
Look after yourself and your mates!
Plan your tasks carefully to avoid accidents

Notes

It is good practice to keep a record of who has heard the talk and when, this template may be helpful.

Record of Attendance

Company	
Location	
Tutor	

This is to confirm that I attended a Tool Box talk on 'Work at Height in cleaning' covering legal requirements; risk assessment; examples of avoiding work at height in general cleaning; examples of avoiding work at height in window cleaning; key safety issues whilst working at height; and hazards when working at height.

Date	Print Name	Signature