

Safety & Health Alert No. 20/2021

Safety Message from Labour Department – Work-above-ground Adjacent to Landings/ Balconies of Buildings

Date : 1 April 2021
Ref. : HD(C)TS 4/49/26

The Labour Department (LD) is highly concerned about recent occurrence of a number of fatal accidents involving workers falling from height to death while carrying out work-above-ground activities adjacent to the permanent railings of landings/ balconies of buildings. We write to call on relevant stakeholders' support in stepping up safety measures immediately with a view to preventing recurrence of similar accidents.

2. The general duty provisions of the Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance require employers to provide safe working environments, plant and safe systems of work for their employees. Duty-holders who contravene the above provisions are liable to a maximum fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for six months.

3. When workers carry out work-above-ground activities at landings/ balconies of buildings that are provided with permanent railings, the railings may not be high enough to offer effective protection. If a worker loses his balance and falls down, there may be a risk of falling over the railings leading to serious injury or even fatality. Hence, before workers carry out any work-above-ground at a landing/ balcony of building, contractors and employers shall conduct task-specific risk assessment, formulate safe work methods and adopt necessary safety measures and procedures, so as to prevent and eliminate work-related hazards. These safety measures should include, but not limited to, the following:

- avoid work-above-ground where possible by, for example, providing and using specific hand tools to allow the work to be done on the ground;
- if work-above-ground cannot be avoided, take adequate steps, including the provision and ensuring the use of a suitable working platform with guard-rails and toe-boards, a suitable light-duty working platform or other safe means of support;

- for special working environment (such as a restrictive space) where a suitable working platform cannot be erected, provide relevant workers with suitable safety harnesses and provide suitable and secure anchor point(s), independent lifeline(s) or fall arresting system(s) for continuous attachment of the safety harnesses worn by the workers at the workplace;
- take adequate steps to ensure the proper use of safety harnesses, anchor points, independent lifelines and fall arresting systems by the workers throughout the work; and
- avoid the use of ladders and substandard scaffolds when work-above-ground.

4. LD has stepped up its inspection and enforcement, including the commencement of Special Enforcement Operation, to deter unsafe work-above-ground practice and ensure the compliance of occupational safety legislation. Upon discovery of breaches of the law, we will take vigorous enforcement actions, including issuing Suspension Notices and Improvement Notices and taking out prosecutions without prior warning.

5. We appeal to your continuous cooperation and support in ensuring the work safety of workers. Should you need further information, please contact Labour Department on 2559 2297, or email: enquiry@labour.gov.hk.