

Safety & Health Circular No. 45 / 2014

Restricting Use of Ladder for Working at Height

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In recent years, a number of industrial fatalities on construction sites were caused by fall of person from ladders. This has raised grave concern of the industry over site safety in using ladders for working at height.

Ladders are work equipment that neither prevents nor arrests falls. In general, ladders are only used to gain access to areas above or below the working level, however, it is important to appreciate the safe limits of their use – especially for portable ladders.

When considering working at height, a risk assessment must be undertaken to identify the hazards and the degree of risks present. Working platforms should be used for working at a height involving a possible fall of 2 metres or more. For work involving a possible fall of less than 2 metres, working platforms or step platforms with guard-rails should primarily be used for all jobs. Toe-boards are required when such equipment is used near building edge or floor opening to avoid risk of falling object from height. For work with a possible fall of not more than 900mm, step platform and platform ladder without railing can be used. Step ladders and straight ladders are reserved purely as a means of access and egress to working platforms. Platform ladders with guard-rails should be the last resort for work involving a possible fall of more than 900mm and less than 2 metres where use of other equipment is not considered reasonably practicable. Guard-rails should be situated at 450-600mm and 900-1150mm high from the platform and form a barrier to prevent the worker standing on the platform from falling down. Working on the access steps of a platform ladder is prohibited.

For use of a platform ladder, the main contractor is required to demonstrate in the risk assessment mentioned above that it is the only viable solution. Further control of the risk is still needed by making sure that the following safety measures are fulfilled:

- the right type of platform ladder is used for the job, e.g. it is long or high enough.

- the workers who will use the platform ladders are provided with adequate information, instruction, training and supervision.
- the workers are fully aware of the risks and control measures.
- the workers who will carry out electrical works on ladder should isolate and lock electric supply before putting up notice of isolation of electric supply.
- the contractor should follow a safe system of work (including a pre-use check) so as to use the platform ladder safely.

This content of this circular should not be regarded as exhaustive in respect of matters covered by relevant safety legislation. Contractors should formulate relevant safe working procedures and management systems according to the actual environment and operations on their own construction sites.

The following examples of working platform and platform ladder are just for reference and the details of requirements should be referred to the textual content above –



Mobile elevated working platform



Low-level working platform



Step platform
(full guard-rails and toe-boards are required when used near building edge or floor opening to avoid risk of person and objects falling from height)



Low-level working platform
(toe boards are required when used near building edge or floor opening to avoid risk of falling object)



Platform ladder with platform at not more than 900mm from floor level



Platform ladder with platform at more than 900mm but less than 2m from floor level

Incident



Step platform with platform at more than 900mm but less than 2m from floor level



Platform ladder with platform at more than 900mm but less than 2m from floor level