

SURVIVAL TIPS

Suggestions to keep you healthy and free of injury

Occasional height work

The people most at risk from height work are not so much the regular rigging/roofing contractors but the people who occasionally decide to climb ladders, go on to roofs or climb other structures. Are you one of them?

Often these tasks are unplanned. Spur of the moment decisions are made without thinking through the consequences. The underlying cause of many falls is lack of planning and poor perception of risk. Remember, gravity never sleeps.

Tip 1: Plan all height work

Before *any* work at height, use a simple five-step process to manage specific tasks and associated hazards.

1. Identify the hazard(s).
2. Assess the hazard(s):
 - is it high, medium or low risk?
 - can you eliminate or isolate the hazard?
 - if not, how can you minimise the hazard?
3. Define safe practices and work methods.
4. Implement the agreed 'Safe System of Work';
5. Continue to monitor it.

LADDER SAFETY

Tip 2: Is your ladder suitable?

Can your task be carried out safely from a ladder? If not, consider using a cherrypicker, scissor hoist or scaffolding, or calling in a competent contractor. If possible, avoid using your ladder as a working platform. Working from rungs for long periods is tiring.

Tip 3: Safe ladder, safe surface

Use only certified 'as safe' ladders that are undamaged and

suitable for the working load. Inspect your ladder before use. Use it only as intended, on a flat, firm and secure surface.

Tip 4: Make your ladder secure

Check the ladder's angle observes the four-up, one-out rule. Secure the top and bottom as soon as it is in place. If the bottom cannot be easily secured, use a second person to secure the bottom rung. Ensure the top is at least a metre above the step-off point unless another handhold is available. If it is in a walkway or work area, use cones or high-viz marking tape, and tell people of the overhead task to be done. If you don't, you may be knocked off your perch.

Tip 5: Act safely on the ladder

When climbing the ladder, keep three points of contact at all times. Climb smoothly and do not work from a rung or step higher than a metre below the top of the ladder. Do not over-reach sideways - get down and move the ladder. Only one person at a time should be on a ladder. Never hang tools or other items from steps or rungs. If working above head height, take rest breaks.

Tip 6: Raise heavy loads appropriately

Do not carry heavy items up a ladder - use other means to raise plant, equipment etc.

OTHER HEIGHT WORK

Tip 7: Should I even do this work?

Work on roofs, building structures, tanks etc is of higher risk and proper fall restraint or arrest systems should be used. Do not undertake height/roof work of any sort unless you are

competent and have the correct safety equipment. If you are unsure of the hazards and safe methods, plan the work with the help of competent contractors.

Tip 8: Use fall arrest gear

Use only certified fall restraint or arrest equipment and ensure that you and your workmates using such gear have attended a recognised height safety training course.

Tip 9: Check your anchor points

If clipping a harness onto a building structure, ensure the anchor point is suitable and strong enough for your body weight, when falling. This is at least 2.2 tonnes. Horizontal lifeline systems must be fitted by qualified people and certified by a professional engineer. A full body harness is not much good if the anchor point breaks. Harnesses should be connected via an approved shock absorber to minimise injuries in a fall.

Tip 10: Check out the roof

Before going onto a roof, ensure that there is no brittle roofing, skylights or other hazards. Pick a safe route and stick to it, noting any suspect areas. Use duckboards if required to even out load.

Disclaimer: these survival tips are general in nature and are not intended to be comprehensive. Always take into account your own particular circumstances. If you have any questions, please discuss them with your supervisor.

This issue's survival tips supplied by Auckland-based consultancy TQM Safety Ltd.