

Safety Corner

How to Enhance the Safety of “Working at Height”?

“Person fall from heights” is the primary hazard in construction and maintenance works as working at heights is inevitable and the consequence is usually severe. In the past years, fall from heights attributed to over 10% of the total industrial accident in HK construction industry but over 30% of the total fatalities.

To control the risk of this hazard, some countries have set up specific statutory regulations, such as the UK Working at Heights Regulations. Besides setting prescriptive requirements on protective equipment and working conditions where there is a risk of a fall liable to cause personal injury, the Regulations require duty holders to ensure that

- all work at height is properly planned and organised;
- those involved in work at height are competent and supervised;
- the risks from working at height are assessed and appropriate work equipment is selected and used;
- the risks of working on or near fragile surfaces are properly controlled; and
- equipment for work at height is properly inspected and maintained.

Notably, the Regulations require duty holders to carry out risk assessments in relation to all operations to identify the relevant hazards and risks related to working at height, and put control measures in place to prevent an accident from occurring. The risk assessments must be site specific and not generic.

Once fall from height hazards have been identified, there is a simple hierarchy for managing the risks:

- eliminate the work at height risk if alternative work can be arranged;
- if the work can not be eliminated, use work equipment or other measures to prevent falls from height; e.g., through the provision of guardrails; and
- use work equipment or other measures to minimise the distance and consequences of a fall should one occur.

Although we have a number of legal requirements and regulations about working at heights in HK, a specific regulation on work at height could be what we need to raise the awareness and prevent more fatal “person fall from height” accidents in Hong Kong.

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