

# Guidance

## Dropped Tools Checklist and Controls

If you or your company does any work at height you are most likely aware of safety regulations in place to keep individuals and job sites as safe as possible. Regulations are not intended to hinder work progress or slow down a project, but to keep everyone involved thinking and behaving in a safe manner. This is vitally necessary when you consider the fact that thousands of workers around the UK are injured every year as the result of working at height accidents.

Many of the actions which cause injury involved dropped parts and tools. For example, something as small as a bolt can become a deadly missile when dropped from a height of just three stories. The simple laws of physics demonstrate that as the bolt falls to the ground it picks up speed and thus, force as well. Even if wearing a hard hat, someone on the ground being hit by the bolt could be seriously injured or even killed. That's why safety measures for dropped tools are vitally important.

Part of dropped tools safety is a check list that workers and supervisors go through before beginning a job. This check list usually includes 15 to 20 items broken down into three categories: understanding possible risks, identifying specific risks, and employing controls. As each of the items is checked off the list workers are ensuring that the risk of dropped tools is being reduced. Failure to abide by the dropped tools check list, and the controls to be implemented, could prove to have serious consequences.

### Understanding the Risks

When developing a dropped tools check list it is important that inspectors and workers both understand the risks of falling objects. This understanding involves not only the principles of physics, but the dynamics of the individual job site in question. For example, what is the possibility that a dropped object could hit the ground and bounced off a concrete slab into an area adjacent to the work site? It's not enough to know the physics of dropped objects, you must also assess all the possibilities a dropped tool holds.

Understanding risks involves knowing things like foot traffic patterns, the likelihood of other workers being in and around the working at height area, weather conditions that might affect workers and how they use tools, worker fatigue at the end of the day, and so forth. Only when individuals understand all the potential risks of a particular job site are they then equipped to identify specific risks and pose solutions.

### Identifying Risks

The second category of items on the dropped tools check list involves identifying specific risks in relation to a particular job site. This may be the hardest part of the task for inspectors and workers. Usually this is due to the fact that there are far more risks than our brains are able to comprehend. Sometimes it's helpful to have multiple individuals assess a job site on an individual basis. While most of the identified risks will overlap among inspectors, each one will undoubtedly identify some risks the others missed.

Furthermore, never under estimate an unlikely risk someone has identified - even if you have missed it. If you've been around dangerous work sites long enough you know that nothing is impossible. Some of the worst accidents are the freak ones that were never expected or planned for. Be careful to take into consideration all the risks identified and develop mitigation plans appropriately. Also be prepared to

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Continually update their procedures and controls when the new risks are identified.

## Implementing Controls

Finally, the third category of items on your dropped tools check list involves implementing specific controls. Details of these controls may or may not be included on your check list, but they should be documented somewhere. In going through the check list workers must confirm that they are aware of, understand, and are practising proper safety controls. Safety controls take into consideration elevation systems, tool tethering systems, weather conditions, and other environmental variables.

Be aware that the law further stipulates working at height is to be done in the safest possible way. That means considering things like whether or not the same work could be done more safely at ground level. It involves relying on a combination of safety nets, covered walkways, and tool tethers, rather than just one of the controls. In other words, the law mandates that companies that carry out working at height activities spare nothing to insure worker and tool safety.

## Supervisory Requirements

Overall job safety is only as effective as the workers who implement safety controls properly. For this reason site supervisors need to be constantly monitoring work areas to ensure controls are being followed. That also means these same supervisors need to know specifically what controls are in place and how they are to be implemented. When workers and supervisors are both aware of control systems they're much more likely to be followed.

One thing about safety controls to consider is the fact that they may evolve over the life of a given project. The truth is, no working at height job remains the same all the time. There are so many variables that factor into a day's work that controls used yesterday may not be appropriate today. Workers and supervisors need to be able to adapt current controls and implement new ones to take into account varying conditions. Nowhere is this more apparent than when dealing with changeable weather conditions.

Control systems put in place to deal specifically with inclement weather should be a part of every safety check list. Weather plays such an important part in how workers act and react, that to simply dismiss it as unimportant is to increase the potential of accidents. Never neglect the weather when going through your dropped tools check list.

The dropped tools safety check list is a vital part of any working at height works. It is required by law that this documentation be used, so don't try to work around the issue. Make sure your safety assessments are done properly, your check lists are utilized, and you maintain all paperwork in an orderly and updated manner.

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