

# Guidance

## Fallen Object Risk Assessment for the Workplace

Businesses involved in working at height know that there are specific regulations in place to ensure worker safety. These regulations apply to everything from the safe use of ladders to fall arrest systems and dropped objects. Yet regardless of the nature of work involved, and the work place site where the work is taking place, the one thing they all have in common is the requirement to have risk assessments done prior to any work starting.

Risk assessments are the only way to ensure that work place planning can account for potential safety risks. This is true for both objects and dropped tools that might fall to the ground. Where falling objects are specifically concerned, assessments must take into consideration the various types of objects at risk, the risk those objects pose to people on the ground, localised area and the best way to secure those objects while still allowing workers to be productive.

### The More Thorough the Better

The best fallen object risk assessments are as thorough as possible. This means having those responsible for the assessment being intimately familiar with the scope of work being done and the tools to be used. As an example, having your assessment done by an individual who spent his career working as a plumber is only appropriate to plumbing applications unless that person has undergone extensive retraining. For working at height applications, you're better off using someone who is competent and certified.

This is not to say that management cannot be acquainted in various disciplines. Certainly they can. But it will help their understanding if they are allowed to experience the work first-hand. It might be helpful then, for less experienced employees to actively spend time on similar sites learning and observing the intricacies of each activity before being given assessment responsibilities. The more first-hand knowledge a planner has about a specific trade and scope of work, the more thorough his assessment can be.

### Assessments Must Not Be Ignored

Although it sounds fairly obvious, we cannot understate the importance of adhering to the results of all safety risk assessments. Ignoring those assessments is a recipe for potential accidents which could result in injuries or property loss. And if HSE officials investigating an accident determine that risk assessments were ignored, your business and management could be in for stiff punitive penalties. Safety assessments exist for a reason; they should not be ignored under any circumstances.

Risk assessments for falling objects should take into consideration as many environmental variables as possible. That means not only looking at the type of work being done and the tools used, but other conditions that might influence either one. For example, assessing the safety of workers at a height of five stories needs to be considered in relation to such things as weather conditions. Doing such work in early summer is a far different matter than doing it in the middle of winter. Other environmental conditions include positioning of buildings, relative exposure, proximity to other activities and trades, population densities, number of items, transportation of material, static weight, height, frequency and duration and so on.

## LEADING EDGE

Tool Safety Solutions Ltd  
Unit 5  
Glenmore Business Park  
Aerodrome Road  
Gosport  
Hampshire  
United Kingdom

Tel +44 (0) 1329 550 121  
Fax +44 (0) 1329 550 470  
Email [sales@leadingedgesafety.co.uk](mailto:sales@leadingedgesafety.co.uk)  
Web [toollanyardsbagsandbelts.com](http://toollanyardsbagsandbelts.com)

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## Ongoing Assessments

Although UK law doesn't specifically dictate the necessary for ongoing risk assessments for static job sites they are still a good idea. Even if the scope and the major components of a work place remain unchanged over the entire course of a project, the site still evolves as progress is being made. Therefore it is helpful to re-evaluate and conduct new risk assessments with every phase of the project or start of a new task. Managers and supervisors capable of doing these assessments are a great asset to any company.

Along with those risk assessments goes the responsibility for individual tool and safety system inspection. While the law mandates annual inspections, it would be a good idea to inspect worker's tools and the safety systems in place at the same time risk assessments are being done. If a particular activity advances at a fast rate and contains high levels of collective risk, you could conceivably have four assessments and quarterly inspections.

Keep in mind that these ongoing assessments don't necessarily need to be long, drawn out affairs. As long as a task is being done safely, an assessment can be done during the course of a regular work week while the work is continuing. Don't feel as though you can't do ongoing assessments because you can't afford to interrupt work. An efficiently operating workplace should be able to carry on while assessments are going on in the background.

## Maintaining Paperwork and Documentation Control

One of the most important components to any dropped object risk assessment is the proper use and maintaining of document control. This paperwork documents the results of the risk assessment and provides the framework needed to make the workplace as safe as possible. Moreover, it is useful when doing future assessments in order to maintain continuity, productivity and measured advancements. Although reporting can be a hassle it is essential for the proper operation of safe at height job sites, in addition providing clear visibility for others to pick up, implement and control.

In terms of the thoroughness of paperwork, it can be considered just as important as a thorough assessment itself. Your paperwork should be filled out in accordance with the specific legal requirements and best practice, and in much detail as possible. A project planner who is thorough in his dropped object risk assessment will maintain paperwork that is beneficial to the work task. Keeping reporting organized and readily available will also help the cause considerably.

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United Kingdom

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Fax +44 (0) 1329 550 470  
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## Considering the Worker Input

As much as risk competent assessment personnel are considered experts in their field, they should always be prepared to ask for worker input. It is the workers who put into practice the safety recommendations offered by supervisors. And since they are the ones actually securing tools and objects at height safety, they will have a better understanding of working conditions which may affect safety. Management should always be willing to consult with workers and seriously consider their recommendations and practical suitability.

Communicating with workers and taking their suggestions also gives them a sense of contribution to a project and operation. This is beneficial to overall safety when you consider that workers who feel as though they are contributing intend to take a certain amount of ownership over it. That sense of ownership encourages them to be very careful about following all safety procedures. And where falling objects are concerned, this kind of attitude is invaluable and contribute towards behavioural change.

Author: N. S. Beardmore October 2011

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Unit 5  
Glenmore Business Park  
Aerodrome Road  
Gosport  
Hampshire  
United Kingdom

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