

# Guidance

## Lost Tools, Impact Damage, Time Disruptions and Personal Injury the Real Cost

Operatives working at height know that dropping tools is the last thing they want to do throughout the course of the workday. For the employee, it's a good way to get yourself in trouble with the boss. For the site supervisor or business owner dropped tools represent lots of other headaches they can do without. Those headaches include lost tools, impact damage, time disruptions, and personal injury. These are some of the real costs of dropped tools, and they far outweigh the expense of developing a legal and proper safety program and adhering to it.

Admittedly, it does cost time and money to do a risk assessment. It does cost money to invest in the proper equipment needed to secure tools. And finally, it does cost time and money to train your employees how to be safe. But at the end of the day think how much more it could cost you if one of your workers had a dropped object accident; an accident which came back on you because you were not practising proper safety. You don't even want to think about the consequences of something like that.

With all that said, let's look at these four very real costs of dropped tools.

### Lost Tools

The simple mathematics of physics demonstrates that even the most basic hand tools can be irreparably damaged from a fall of just two or three stories. More sensitive tools don't even require that great a distance. So from an economic standpoint, it makes little sense to send your workers up into the air without tools being properly tethered. One drop of the £200 cordless drill and you'll be heading off to the local DIY store to replace it.

Lost and damaged tools are perhaps the biggest financial expense of not properly tethering items at height. Yet properly secured, there's no reason why any of your tools should not last just as long as the manufacturer suggests. And with customised tethering solutions to fit just about any tool, you can keep them protected while still working comfortably and efficiently. It just takes a little know-how and the experience of a good tool safety equipment manufacturer.

### Impact Damage

If you or a worker accidentally drops a tool it will almost always result in some sort of impact damage - whether it's major or minor. Minor damage can include small chips on the pavement, holes in the soil, punctured or torn awnings, and the like. More serious impact damage could involve broken windows, damaged vehicles, and so on. But regardless of whether the damage is major or minor, who do you suppose pays to repair it? Your insurance company, that's who.

Your liability insurance is already expensive enough. Do you want to add to the cost simply for the sake of not developing and implementing a tool safety program? It seems a foolish waste of money to allow your rates to go up after an accident when the accident could have been avoided very inexpensively. Impact damage from falling tools is real; real enough that it's not worth the potential consequences for not tethering your tools. And remember, all tools should be tethered or packed securely in a tethered tool bag - regardless of how large or small they are.

### Time Disruptions

Every job supervisor hates disruptions. Disruptions interrupt work flow, productivity, and concentration. Disruptions also cost time and money. Yet when tools are not properly secured at height workers and site managers are just inviting time disruptions. For example, If you're working on the fourth floor and drop your hammer, even if it does not damage or cause physical injury on its way down you still have to stop what you're doing, climb down, and retrieve it.

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The entire process may take up to 10 minutes depending on your access/egress situation. Now, if that happened six times in a day you've lost an entire hours' worth of work simply retrieving your tools.

If impact damage has occurred, you'll spend additional time explaining yourself and cleaning up the mess. Using our previous example of the hammer, if it were to bounce off an awning and shatter a car window, think of how long it will take you to clean up that mess. You may not get back to work for at least a couple of hours. When inspectors arrive later on to investigate the accident you will likely be spending time dealing with them rather than being productive. As you can see, it's just not worth it.

## Personal Injury

Thankfully the vast majority of dropped object accidents don't involve personal injury or death. But those things still happen. Every year in the UK there are hundreds of injuries - some are very serious - and a handful of deaths from dropped objects. Even setting aside the financial consequences and disruptions of dropped tools, you still have the real possibility of serious injury and death. Keep in mind that a simple screwdriver dropped from just two stories can become a deadly projectile upon impact.

It is incumbent upon workers at height and their managers to secure their tools from dropping; if for no other reason than to prevent personal injury or death. It's certainly not worth the time and money you'd save by not implementing safety procedures if it costs someone else life or limb. Emotional scars suffered by the victim's family members, as well as the worker who dropped the tool only serve to make matters worse. For the sake of everyone below you, make sure you mitigate as much falling object risk as possible.

With that in mind, a good tool safety program keeps the area underneath your workspace free of other workers or visitors unless it's absolutely necessary to be otherwise. But on the outside chance someone does wander underneath your scaffolding or your cherry picker, being hit on the head by a hammer, saw, drill, or whatever, could prove fatal. Even if not fatal, injuries could be severe enough that the victim will end up suffering for the remainder of their life.

## Process is Important

In order to properly secure your tools and reduce the likelihood they'll be dropped, you and your employees need training in the correct process. The process begins with a risk assessment study done by someone qualified for the task. From that study derives the guidelines by which all work areas will remain safe and tools protected. Next, site managers and workers take those guidelines and implement them through the various pieces of safety equipment supplied by the company. Inspections take place before work is allowed to begin at the site, and are conducted thereafter on a regular schedule.

In principle the idea of tool safety is not difficult. But if it makes you uncomfortable, think about the real, hidden costs of dropped tools. Consider the potential for permanently damaging or losing your tools, the possible impact damage, the time disruptions, and the real risk of personal injury or death.

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