

Selecting competent contractors for work at height

‘Height Aware’ campaign

Information sheet 3

If you need to use contractors to carry out work at height, this information will help you select the most suitable organisation and make sure the work is done safely. Contractors bidding for work will also find it useful.

Are you responsible for maintaining a building or a piece of plant? Does this involve the need to work at height? Tasks might include gutter cleaning, painting, roof repairs, or servicing plant and electrical equipment. If you are, you need to make sure any contractors you use for this work are competent to work at height.

Selecting contractors

Identify the work that needs to be done. This will help you decide the sort of contractor you need and the type of competence you will expect them to have.

Ask the following questions to help you decide if the contractor is competent to do the work you need them to do.

- Their experience:
 - What experience do they have in the type of work?
 - Can they provide references? You may want to check these.
- Their competence:
 - Do their workers have any appropriate qualifications, training and experience? This is important if they are using work equipment, eg tower scaffolds, cherry pickers etc.
 - Are they a member of a trade or professional body?
 - What is their safety performance like (eg accident records)?
 - Can they provide examples of methods of work, risk assessments or other relevant documentation to show they are familiar with the type of work?
- Their management arrangements:
 - What are their procedures for managing health and safety?
 - Will the work be sub-contracted and if so, how will they control it?

- How do they supervise and manage their site work?
- How do they monitor and check their own safety standards?
- How do they inspect and check their equipment (owned or hired)?
- Do they have employers’ liability insurance?

- Are they asking you for any information about your risks or needs?

The more complex and potentially dangerous the activities, the more likely it is that the answers and information will need to be recorded.

As the client, you will be responsible for checking that any contractor you appoint is competent to do the work safely. Work which involves greater risks, eg work on roofs, will need more thorough checks to ensure that the contractor has the necessary skills and knowledge.

Once you have selected a competent contractor, you will need to exchange information and agree the method of work.

Both will need to be done before work starts. Pre-work meetings are a good way of ensuring that the work is properly planned and controlled. Finally, you will also need to monitor the work.

Exchanging information

Make sure you talk to and co-operate with your contractor so that the following points are covered:

- Establish who the contacts are and their telephone numbers, so both sides know who to talk to during the job and any problems can be discussed and settled. The contacts should be those people who were involved in agreeing the work, so they have a detailed understanding of it and the agreed precautions.
- Discuss the following if they are relevant to your job:
 - your site rules/induction;
 - fire/emergency procedures;
 - signing in and out procedures;
 - segregation arrangements;
 - specific site hazards that the contractor needs to be aware of, eg fragile materials, live electrics, location of any asbestos materials, vehicle movements and process hazards, eg fume, heat etc.

Agree the method of work

The method of work should be in writing, unless the work is low risk and of short duration. The amount of detail included should reflect the complexity of the work.

A good method of work will:

- be clear and concise;
- be relevant to the job;
- identify the potential dangers;
- specify the method of work and precautions to take to remove or minimise the risk;
- identify how the work will be supervised and managed.

It should include, eg:

- specification of the type(s) of access equipment to be used, eg powered access, scaffold towers;
- arrangements for delivering, moving and erecting access equipment safely;
- how the safety of the access equipment will be checked;
- what arrangements are needed to ensure the safety of people near the work, eg if segregation from moving vehicles is needed;
- arrangements for dealing with specified site risks, eg whether electrical isolation is required;
- local storage arrangements for materials and any waste items; and
- the sequence the work should be carried out in, especially if it is not obvious.

The level of supervision a contractor ought to provide will depend on the degree of risk involved in the work and on the level of confidence in the workforce's performance. For example, an experienced team of employees carrying out work which is routine for them will need less supervision than workers who are less experienced or carrying out unfamiliar tasks.

Monitor the work

All contractors need to be monitored by you to make sure the agreed arrangements and precautions are carried out. The level of monitoring needed will depend on the risk level of the work and the extent to which the work may endanger your employees, your visitors and other people for whom you are responsible.

You will need to take the following steps:

- **before** work starts, check that the equipment they said they would use is there and that agreed supervisory and segregation arrangements are in place. Check training certificates;
- **during** the work, use the agreed method of work to monitor the work as it progresses, by carrying out regular checks. Are they using the work equipment and methods of work that they said they would? Are the trained people on site? If not, ask why and ensure corrective action is taken;
- **after** the work has finished, review their performance to see if everything went as planned, so you will have confidence when choosing them for future work.

Want to know more?

This is one of five 'Height Aware' campaign information sheets. The others in the series are:

Sheet 1: Work at height: The basics

Sheet 2: Selecting equipment for work at height

Sheet 4: Selecting, using and maintaining personal fall protection equipment

Sheet 5: Minor roof maintenance work: Protecting against falls

More information is available on the HSE website www.hse.gov.uk/falls and from HSE Infoline on 0845 345 0055.