

Fragile roof safety alert for builders



Could this happen to you?

Falls through fragile roofs and fragile rooflights are a major cause of death and injury at work.

A company director was recently sentenced to 16 months imprisonment for not acting to prevent a fatal fall through a fragile rooflight.

This safety alert advises building companies on how to prevent injury and comply with legal requirements.

The problem

On average, one person dies each month at work after falling through a fragile roof or fragile rooflight. Many others suffer permanent disabling injury. These accidents usually occur on roofs of factories, warehouses and farm buildings. Contractors and building owners or occupiers have joint legal responsibility to ensure that construction, repair or cleaning of buildings is planned properly, and carried out safely. See free HSE guidance leaflet *Use of contractors: A joint responsibility* INDG368.

What should building companies do?

First of all, if your company does not have the specialist knowledge for this type of work you should not attempt it. Repairing a fragile roof is potentially high risk. Before work starts, ensure that a competent person assesses the roof

using a safe system of work. All those carrying out the repair work must be suitably trained and supervised. They must follow a method statement that details the working method based on a risk assessment which is specific to the task.

Non-fragile assemblies for new and replacement roofs should be used, where possible, and installed according to manufacturers' instructions. You should allow sufficient resources, in time, money and expertise, to provide and implement effective precautions. See photographs overleaf.

You should provide and use suitable safe working platforms fitted with guardrails etc.

If all work cannot be undertaken from such platforms then steps must be taken to prevent or arrest a fall.

Fall arrest may include:

- safety nets slung close beneath the roof to fully cover all areas of risk; or
- workmen using safety harnesses attached to suitable anchorages.

Fall arrest systems must all be designed properly and installed by trained and competent people.

What enforcement action might be taken by HSE?

The risk from such work is extreme and the required precautions are well established. Prohibition of work and legal proceedings may be instituted if inspectors encounter failure to control risk.

The Work at Height Regulations 2005, the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 1994 (CDM), the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 place duties on those in control of this type of work.

What further information or advice is available?

You can visit the HSE website (www.hse.gov.uk) and download *Working on roofs* INDG284 or call HSE Infoline on 0845 345 0055. Roofwork trade associations also provide more detailed guidance. They have a joint website at www.roofworkadvice.info. Finally, if you or your contractors wish to discuss a specific project, please contact your local HSE office.

Some methods for preventing and arresting falls

Photograph courtesy of Istock Brick Ltd



Working platforms

This shows a mobile elevating work platform (MEWP) being used to replace a roof sheet without standing on the roof itself. All required work is undertaken from the MEWP. The workmen are also wearing safety harnesses attached to the MEWP.



Photograph courtesy of Easi-Dec Access Systems Ltd

Harnesses

This shows workmen wearing safety harnesses attached by lanyards to a work positioning line which is fixed to the working platform. The work taking place is on a fragile roof and is adjacent to a fragile rooflight.

Note: Preference should be given to (i) preventing falls rather than minimising injury and to (ii) controls which provide collective rather than individual protection. Each project should be assessed on its merits.

Photograph courtesy of Pombull UK Ltd



Nets

This shows use of safety nets slung close beneath fragile rooflights to cover areas of risk during rooflight replacement within an otherwise load-bearing roof. If the roof itself was fragile, nets may be used to cover all areas of risk.