

Fragile roof safety alert for building owners and occupiers



Could this happen on your premises?

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 owners and occupiers 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 owners and occupiers do?

Specify non-fragile assemblies for new and replacement roofs, where possible, and install these according to

manufacturers' instructions. Before work starts, ensure that a competent person assesses the roof using a safe system of work. All those carrying out work must be suitably trained and supervised.

You should be satisfied that contractors allow sufficient resources, in time, money and expertise, to provide and implement effective precautions. See photographs overleaf.

Contractors 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 Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 also place responsibilities on building owners and occupiers.

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 Ilistock, 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.