



# Safety focus on: Falls, slips and trips

This guide highlights the key risks to you from falling, both at height and due to a slip or trip and provides practical advice on how you can make your farm a safer place for you, your employees and any visitors.

## The Law

*The Work at Height Regulations 2005 covers all work activities where people could fall and injure themselves. Employers, the self-employed and others who have control over work at height all have duties. You must make sure work at height is properly planned, using the correct equipment, supervised and carried out by people who are competent to do the job.*

## Introduction

### Falls from Height

Working at height without protection, only needs one mistake or lapse in concentration to result in death or serious injury. Over the past two years, more than 380 people have been injured and at least six killed by falling from height while working on farms.

Try to avoid having to work at height in the first place. Think about ways to design or engineer systems to avoid having to routinely work at height.

There are many instances in farming when you can't avoid working at height for example cleaning gutters, constructing and maintaining sheds and stacking bales. In these situations you should take a few moments to consider how to complete the task safely, e.g. using a work platform instead of a ladder.

### **Case Study**

A farm worker was walking along the valley gutter of a roof. The gutter was narrow and he could not get his feet beside each other so had to move along with one foot on the nail line of the fragile roof sheets.

As he was cleaning and moving along the gutter, one of the roof sheets gave way and he fell over 3 meters to the concrete floor below. He suffered head injuries and cuts to his feet. The farm estate was prosecuted for failing to take reasonable precautions to prevent a fall and fined £3,000.

### Slips and trips

Thinking about how to reduce slips and trips may sound trivial, however, two people have died on farm over the past two years from slipping or tripping on a flat surface and countless more suffer knocks, bumps, strains and fractures from slipping over, especially in the winter months. These more minor injuries can still have a big effect on your productivity, leading to many lost days over the course of a year.

### **Case Study**

In December 2010, an 85 year old farmer in County Mayo, Ireland slipped on a patch of ice in his farmyard, and died from the head injuries he sustained. His body was found around an hour after the accident by relatives who came to check on him.

There are four main areas you should focus on when looking at how to make your farm a safer place as regards falls and slips:

1. [Safe Site](#)
2. [Safe Roof](#)
3. [Safe Platforms](#)
4. [Safe Machinery](#)

### Safe Site

Slips, trips and falls can happen anywhere on the farm. When looking at your farm, think about whether the weather conditions, machinery movements, the day's tasks and any external visitors (contractors, delivery drivers and casual workers) would make moving around the site more dangerous.

If a slippery surface occurs due to a spillage or as a result of cold weather, you should try to remove the hazard or at least take extra precautions and inform others on the farm. Injuries can occur when someone trips over an obstacle. Check working areas like farm workshops and yards are free from obstructions, such as trailing cables which should be clearly marked and moved out of the way where possible e.g. placed safely overhead.



Good lighting can reduce the risk of tripping over in sheds and yards and is particularly important in the winter months when much of the day is spent in dark or dull conditions.

Visiting workers such as lorry drivers and vets should be notified of any potential hazards, as you have a duty to ensure they are safe when they are on your premises or farm.

#### **Case Study**

A farmer in Scotland was using a slurry tanker to pump out rainwater in the winter. He got out of the tractor, leaving it running to see to the pump on the slurry tanker. As he pushed the pump lever across he slipped on some ice, catching his shirt on the partially guarded PTO shaft of the slurry tanker.

His shirt was ripped violently from his body; taking the skin from the left side of his chest and arm with it. As he fell to the ground he hit the back of his head on the draw bar of the tanker, knocking him unconscious for almost an hour and a half in the freezing weather.

His internal injuries were extensive and included a ruptured spleen, four broken ribs and damage to his lungs and kidneys. He spent four days in high dependency and was allowed home ten days later.

It took seven months before he was able to return to doing any manual work. In the meantime he had to pay to bring in casual labour to do his jobs.

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#### **Safe Roof**

Every year people die and are seriously injured while working on fragile shed roofs. Never walk along the line of purlin bolts.

You have a legal duty to take steps to prevent people falling through fragile roofs and should use equipment such as roof ladders, crawling boards and roof light guards when working on roofs as well as training your staff in how to work safely.

Your protection equipment should span across at least three purlins and you should provide edge protection to prevent people and objects such as hammers falling off the roof.

Think about using safety harnesses, roof nets or even keeping bales stacked in the shed to reduce the distance that someone could fall.

#### **Case Study**

A nineteen year old worker was helping repair a fibre cement roof, there were no crawling boards and roof lights were not guarded. The farm had a safety net, but it was not used and the worker fell 4½ metres through a fragile roof light, breaking his left wrist and bruising his left hip. A partner in the farming business was fined a total of £6,000 plus £682 costs.

#### **Case Study**

A HSE inspector witnessed a worker access a roof via a ladder and planks between pallets, 4 metres high on two raised forklift trucks. The Farm Manager was on an unsecured ladder and a casual worker was working on an asbestos cement sheet roof with no protection.

The following investigation concluded that no edge protection or other precautions had been taken for working on or near fragile roofs, the access arrangements were unsafe (resulting in two Enforcement Notices), there was inadequate protection from asbestos and the level of supervision was unsatisfactory.

The farmer was prosecuted for failing to ensure so far as reasonably practicable the health and safety of employees and fined £7,000 plus £2,000 costs.

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#### **Safe Platforms**

If you need to work at height, when possible, you should use properly designed work platforms rather than ladders.

Fully integrated and properly constructed working platforms such as cherry pickers are the best solution. This reduces the need to rely on another person to control the machine and removes the risk of a misunderstanding between the person doing the lifting and the person being lifted.

Never use makeshift equipment such as grain buckets or pallets as these can result in serious injuries and death if the machine tips accidentally.



If you use a telehandler or similar, the work platform must be properly secured to the machine, not simply held on with tines. A tilt lock will stop the platform being accidentally tilted and tipping someone off.

You should agree a method of communication between the person on the platform and the driver of the machine to avoid the risk of misunderstandings.

#### **Case Study**

Two horticulture employees were cutting the top off a line of conifer trees using a bow saw when they shouted to the driver to lower them, but he selected forward gear instead of reverse. This caused the vehicle to move forward suddenly and the cage to fall almost three metres to the floor with the men still inside. The men sustained major injuries.

The company was fined £3,500 plus costs of £796 for using a work platform that was not fastened properly to the machine and had no front edge protection.

#### **Case Study**

An employee fractured his leg and pelvis after falling from and being crushed by an unsecured potato box that was being used as a work platform on the forks of a raised forklift truck.

The company were prosecuted for using an unsafe system of work, despite a safety cage being available on site. The company pleaded guilty and were fined £1,500 plus £2,358 costs.

#### Scaffolding

Using a properly designed and erected scaffold can reduce the chance of an accident when compared to working from a ladder.

The scaffold should be on a level, firm ground with baseplates and be properly braced with vertical supports every 2 to 2.5 metres.

Scaffold boards should be tied down and not overlap. To prevent people and tools falling from the scaffold, there should also be guard rails and toe boards along the outer edges of the structure.

#### Ladders

When a work platform or scaffold is not available, or is not practical to use, ladders can be used to work at height.

Ladders must be suitable for the task, properly maintained, regularly checked for defects and not used if significantly damaged. For some years the HSE has operated a scheme to encourage people to scrap damaged and dangerous ladders.

When using a ladder, you should make sure it is securely placed on a level and firm footing and not leant against a fragile surface, such as fibre cement gutters. You should also leave a metre overlap at the top of the ladder to get on and off if you are using it to access roofs etc.

The best way to stop a ladder slipping is by tying the ladder to a stable structure and by using a suitable stability device. Using a person to foot a ladder is the least effective of these methods and should only be used as a last resort.

#### **Case Study**

A 56 year old farmer from Yorkshire died when he fell from a ladder. He was placing wooden boards on top of a water tank when he fell from the ladder to the concrete floor below.

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#### Safe Machinery

Farm machinery is getting larger and the newer machines have the ability to carry bigger and heavier loads. This can create issues with loading, moving, unloading and even maintenance.

#### Bales

Good bale stacking is a real skill and only a skilled and experienced person, or someone undergoing training should stack bales. Loads of small, conventional bales should be built to bind themselves and only sound bales used on edges.

To reduce the risk of injury, you should use handling equipment such as loaders as much



as possible. If bales are removed by hand, they should always be taken from the top-down and workers be made aware of the dangers of taking bales from stacks - multiple people have died after being hit by falling bales.

To make sure your load is as secure as possible check the following:

- The trailer floor is in good condition
- The trailer is securely braked during loading and unloading
- Loads are sheeted (where possible)
- Loads are adequately and securely strapped, tidying up any loose rope or straps
- Loads are regularly checked during transport as straw can move and settle

#### **Case Study**

A 62 year old member of the public was killed in Devon, when a round bale fell from a tractor and rolled from the field on to the road, hitting his van.

#### Maintenance

With tractors and farm machines getting bigger, farmers are increasingly required to work at height, even when carrying out routine maintenance on machines such as harvesters. To reduce the risk of an accident occurring, make sure the machine is secure using the Safe Stop procedure:



**Always follow the Safe Stop procedure, no matter how short your stop:**

1. **Handbrake on**
2. **Controls in neutral**
3. **Engine off**
4. **Key out**

See whether the job can be carried out from the ground, if this is not possible, consider using a platform or at least a secured ladder to work on the vehicle.

Climbing up on the vehicle should generally be avoided, as there is a greater risk of slipping and falling off.

#### **Case Study**

A 63 year old farmer was found trapped between a tractor and a trailer. There were no witnesses but it is believed that he may have climbed onto the trailer, slipped and hit his head on either the tractor/trailer or the concrete surface in the yard. He later died from severe head injuries sustained in the fall.

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#### **Further information**

HSE can be contacted for specific health and safety information at [www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture](http://www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture)

For agricultural training search [www.lantra.co.uk/CourseFinder](http://www.lantra.co.uk/CourseFinder) or [www.lantra-awards.co.uk](http://www.lantra-awards.co.uk).  
Alternatively call 0845 707 8007.