

Choosing personal fall protection equipment for work at height

A brief introduction to assist purchasers and specifiers.

Personal fall protection should be used in situations where it is not practicable to arrange for the work to be done from a more suitable surface, such as a fixed or temporary work platform. If personal fall protection equipment (FPE) is the chosen method, it is necessary to select a system which will minimise the possibility and consequences of any fall.

If a personal fall protection system that prevents a fall is to be used it should be one designed to prevent the user reaching zones where the risk of a fall exists, or one that prevents the onset of a fall. Where it is not practicable to use a system that prevents a fall, then, as a last resort, a fall arrest system should be used.

The following methods of fall protection are available, listed in order of preference.

Work restraint

This may be appropriate fall arrest equipment, work positioning equipment or a simple belt coupled with a lanyard of limited length. The restraint system should be chosen and arranged so that it is not possible for the user to access zones where the risk of a fall exists

Work positioning

A work positioning system should be used allows the user to be in a partly or entirely supported position. The work positioning system should include a safety back-up system, in addition to the primary support, so that should there be an operator error or failure of the primary support, a fall will be prevented or arrested

Fall arrest

Fall arrest equipment will not prevent a fall from occurring and these systems are therefore the least preferred methods of working at height

Fall arrest systems contain a full body harness conforming to BS EN 361 and a system or device that provides a means of attachment to an anchor, and that has energy absorbing capacity

Rescue equipment

The law requires that planning for work at height must include consideration of rescue and emergency procedures.

Heightec provide appropriate rescue systems are available for all of the above working methods.

Competence

Schedule 5 of The Work at Height Regulations requires that all users of FPE must be competent to do so:

"the user and a sufficient number of available persons have received adequate training specific to the operations envisaged, including rescue procedures"

Training courses in every aspect of work at height are available from our specialist training division, **The National Centre for Work at Height** - see www.work-at-height.co.uk