

Preventing slips, trips and falls from vehicles: The basics

Information sheet WPT01

If you specify delivery vehicles, oversee their maintenance, or manage operations involving the loading/unloading of goods, this information may help you understand why people fall from these kinds of vehicles and how these falls can be prevented.

Why do I need to take any action?

Fall-from-vehicle incidents can cost your company a lot of money. In 2004/05, the human and economic cost of the fall-from-vehicle incidents we know about was over £36.5 million. They often result in serious injuries that keep skilled people, such as lorry drivers, off work for many weeks; agency workers might have to be employed to 'fill in', and deliveries may be delayed. More than 75% of major fall-from-vehicle incidents occur during loading and unloading activities. Fall prevention must be an integral part of planning loading and unloading and selecting the right kind of vehicle is an important part of this.

Work at height – the principles

There are some basic principles for working at height, and they apply equally to working at height on a vehicle. In law, work at height means 'work in any place where a person could fall a distance likely to cause personal injury if no precautions are taken'. It includes getting on and off a vehicle trailer or climbing into or out of a lorry cab.

Although some people might not regard work below average head height as 'work at height', the law requires people to consider falls from any height where someone could be injured, including falls from trailers or the tops of vans. In fact most of the injuries reported to HSE resulting from falls from vehicles are from a fall from below head height. The most common area of the vehicle for people to fall from is the load area, followed by the the cab access steps and fifth wheel catwalk – you don't have to fall far to land hard. If you are in control of the work, you must think in terms of a hierarchy of controls:

- plan to avoid work at height where you can;
- where you can't, make sure you use work equipment to prevent falls:
 - first choice – vehicle-based systems;
 - second choice – on-site systems;

- where the risk of a fall can't be eliminated, use work equipment to minimise the distance and consequences of a fall;
- always consider measures that protect everyone at risk (eg platforms and guardrails) before measures that only protect the individual (eg safety harness).

For some work at height on a vehicle there may not be a single, simple solution. You will have to consider a range of options when you are planning the loading/unloading or maintenance activity.

Using the hierarchy above as the basis, use the best solution (or combination of solutions) for your particular circumstances. Select the most appropriate vehicle for the task, and specify access equipment to reduce the need for working at height and reduce the risk of falls. Here are some examples:

- Avoid working at height unless it is essential: position plant controls at ground level to avoid the need to climb up, use ground-based sheeting systems instead of manually sheeting, on articulated trailers ask for the Suzie connections at the fifth wheel to be fitted on a sliding connector block (or Mavis rail) allowing connection from ground level, avoiding the need to access the catwalk.
- Prevent falls by using work equipment:
 - that protects all those at risk, eg platforms with slip-resistant surfaces, handrails and access steps (vehicle-based are better than site-based, so they are always with the vehicle);
 - that protects the individual, such as work restraint systems, ie a harness and lanyard that make it impossible for a worker to get to a position where they could fall.
- Lessen the effect of falls by using work equipment to minimise the distance and consequences of a fall:
 - that protects all those at risk, eg soft landing systems, nets;
 - that protects the individual, eg a personal fall arrest system with the anchorage point sited above the head.
- Manage fall risks through training, instruction or other means, like checking that access equipment is inspected regularly, applying sensible housekeeping measures, adopting safe working practices to cover work at height activities (eg loading/unloading, cleaning and maintenance).

Aren't slips and trips just funny?

Slips and trips cost industry millions of pounds every year. Preventing slips and trips on vehicles is vital as a significant number of falls from vehicles are as a result of an initial slip or trip. If work at height on a vehicle is unavoidable, you must think about preventing slips and trips as part of the combination of things you do to prevent falls. There are many reasons why people slip, trip and fall at work. The main causes, are:

- **flooring:** including slippery surfaces on load areas and ramps, poorly designed access steps and changes of level, wear and tear (see Information sheets WPT02 and WPT03, listed in Further information);
- **contamination:** rainwater, diesel, oil, mud or ice getting on to surfaces will make them slippery (see Information sheet WPT05);
- **footwear:** selecting the right sole for the surface and contamination type can prevent many slips. However, the wrong footwear can increase the risk of slips and trips (see Information sheet WPT04);
- **environment:** poor lighting or glare, working in high winds or wet weather, condensation on surfaces, or even loud noises can all contribute to slip or trip injuries (see Information sheet WPT05);
- **people:** tiredness, lack of concentration or rushing about can make things worse. Job design (eg 'task and finish') can play an important part in the emphasis on speed of operations. Also the way the job is done, eg having to lift, carry, push/pull loads etc (see Information sheet WPT05).

How do I work out what I need to do?

You need to think about what might go wrong and what you need to do to prevent it, ie carry out a risk assessment. It's important to be sensible and concentrate on the most likely things to happen and those with the greatest possible consequences.

You can't do everything, but this isn't an excuse to do nothing; you have to take action that is 'reasonably practicable'. Also, remember that getting controls put in place is far more important than the paperwork. You won't be able to do everything you want at once, so make a plan for the improvements, concentrating first on the likelihood of an incident and the consequences.

Get help from the workers at the sharp end – they know how the job is really done and normally have good ideas about how to make it safer and more efficient.

Further information

HSE website: www.hse.gov.uk

Workplace transport: www.hse.gov.uk/workplacetransport

Slips and trips: www.hse.gov.uk/slips

Falls from height: www.hse.gov.uk/falls

Five steps to risk assessment Leaflet INDG163(rev2)

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www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf

Safe access to road-going vehicles: Specifying the right equipment WPT02 Information sheet HSE 2007

www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/wpt02.pdf

Selecting flooring materials to avoid falls from vehicles

WPT03 Information sheet HSE 2007

www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/wpt03.pdf

Selecting the right footwear to avoid falls from vehicles

WPT04 Information sheet HSE 2007

www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/wpt04.pdf

Managing work to avoid falls from vehicles

WPT05 Information sheet HSE 2007

www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/wpt05.pdf

Delivering safely: Co-operating to prevent workplace vehicle accidents WPT06 Information sheet HSE 2007

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