



Safety focus on: Farm Buildings

This guide highlights the key risks to you from the construction and maintenance of farm buildings 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.

The Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2007 (CDM) apply to all construction work, with extra responsibilities on sites where more than 5 people are working or the work will take more than 30 days. These require that health and safety is managed throughout all stages of a project, from conception, design and planning through to site work and subsequent maintenance and repair of the structure.

Introduction

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.

When working at height 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.

There are three main areas you should focus on when looking at how to make your farm a safer place as regards farm buildings:

1. **Safe Site**
2. **Safe Roof**
3. **Safe Maintenance**

Safe Construction

Self builds

The erection of a heavy steel frame is a skilled job, requiring the use of specialist equipment and adequately trained erectors. If you are putting the building up yourself you need to make sure you are competent to do so and to include safeguards to make sure the job is conducted safely and use appropriate equipment for the task.

To remain safe:

- Allow plenty of time
- Use enough workers (they also need to have been trained on what to do)
- Use machines that are suitable for the job, safe to use and have been set up correctly
- Use fully integrated and properly constructed working platforms or man cages when lifting people
- Always use safety nets and edge protection, with harnesses being used as a last resort

Contractors

If you are employing a contractor to do any construction or demolition work, you still have certain responsibilities. These obligations include providing relevant site information (on existing structures, intended use and risks such as asbestos and electrical cables), checking suitable management plans are in place and making sure adequate welfare facilities, such as toilets and hand washing facilities are on site before work begins. These facilities need to be in place, but do not necessarily need to be provided by you.

Both you and the contractor have legal obligations for health and safety and these



cannot be passed to each other by contract. Consider asking contractors to provide you with information on what safety precautions they are taking and a copy of their method statement.

Over 30 days

If the construction work will last more than 30 days you will need to do the following:

- Ensure that a contractor takes on the role of Principle Contractor
- Ensure that an F10 Notification of Construction Project form is provided to the HSE
- Appoint a CDM co-ordinator
- Ensure a health and safety plan is in place
- Keep a health and safety file

Case Study

Seven frames of a portal frame building had been erected - one was held in position by guy ropes, while some were attached to trees. The first and second frames were connected with timber purlins bolted in position.

The purlins between the remaining frames were not secured and the building collapsed as three men were working on it.

Safe Site

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.

Injuries can occur when someone trips over an obstacle. Check working areas 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 buildings and yards and is particularly important in the winter months when much of the day is spent in dark or dull conditions.

Visiting workers or contractors 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.

Safe Roof

Every year people die and are seriously injured while working on fragile shed roofs. All roofs should be treated as fragile until a competent person has confirmed otherwise. 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 at height.

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 building 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.



Safe Maintenance

When performing maintenance on a farm building, when possible, you should use properly designed work platforms rather than ladders. However, when a work platform or scaffold is not available, or is not practical to use, ladders can be used.

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 have resulted in serious injuries and death.

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.

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

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 farm employee was cleaning extraction fans on the roof of a poultry unit, when he fell three metres. He had gained access to the roof by climbing up at the low end then walking along the edge of the roof to the fan housings. At one point he had to crouch beneath a live power line which ran over the building.

There was no roof edge protection to prevent falling, no risk assessment had been carried out and no safe system of work had been devised which would have prevented this accident and the worker suffering permanent spinal injuries.

The farming company was fined £19,500 plus £3,095 costs.

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 was fined £1,500 plus £2,358 costs.

Asbestos

Asbestos can be found in many farm buildings in the cement roofing and wall cladding. Care should be taken when repairing or removing items containing this substance as it is a particularly harmful and breathing in air containing asbestos fibres can lead to cancers of the lungs and chest lining.

Specific asbestos regulations require employers to prevent exposure of employees to asbestos.



If this is not reasonably practicable the law says their exposure should be below the Control Limit set out in the ACoP Working with Materials Containing Asbestos - Control of Asbestos Regulations 2006.

To remain safe:

- When working with asbestos wear a disposable mask that is CE marked to EN 149 with FFP3 particulate filters and disposable overalls
- Avoid cleaning asbestos if possible, but if it is essential, use remote cleaning or biocides with low-pressure sprays, rather than dry scrapping or pressure washing
- When removing, reduce the amount of dust produced by keeping the material wet and not breaking the asbestos sheets with power tools or dropping from height, where possible

If there is a lot of asbestos to remove and/or there is likely to be a lot of asbestos dust created, you should consider using a specialist asbestos contractor.

Any waste containing more than 0.1% asbestos by weight must be classed as hazardous waste and disposed of, as soon as possible, in accordance with the hazardous waste regulations. It must not be stored on site for reuse on another building.

Modification

In some cases, you may wish to modify your building by adding to it, or removing parts to make alterations. Before you do any modifications you should check if it is safe to do so and does not affect the structural integrity of your building. A structural surveyor and/or the building's manufacturer should be able to provide advice on this.

Further information

HSE can be contacted for specific health and safety information at www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture.

For agricultural training search [Lantra Course Finder](#) or [Lantra Awards](#). Alternatively call 0845 707 8007.

NFU CallFirst (0870 845 8458) can also provide guidance on health and safety matters.

