

Vertical ladders guidance

In the last year there have been a number of accidents involving falls from height in churches, including two fatalities where volunteers fell from vertical ladders in the bell tower. The Health and Safety Executive advise that it is good practice, and very strongly recommended that people working as volunteers are given the same level of protection as employees.

The following advice is provided to assist parishes.

All work at height must be risk assessed, taking into account the nature of the task, the age and capacity of the volunteer, as well as the layout of the building and any unusual features.

The use of fixed ladders as a means of access between floors should only be considered where a conventional staircase cannot be accommodated and their use is considered safe, based on risk assessment.

Ladders should be maintained in a good state of repair and securely fixed in position. Rungs should be firmly secured in a horizontal position and provide a good foothold. They should extend at least 1.1 metres above any floor accessed by the ladder. Where ladders pass through floors, the size of the opening should be as small as practical, fenced and a gate provided where necessary to prevent falls.

Where possible, safety hoops or a permanently fixed fall arrest system should be fitted to the ladder, as determined appropriate from risk assessment. If hoops are installed they should start at a height of 2.5 metres from the bottom of the ladder and be spaced at a maximum of 900mm intervals. The top hoop should be in line with the top of any fencing on the floor served by the ladder.

Expert advice on work at height related issues is available from Ecclesiastical Risk Services Ltd (a company in the Ecclesiastical Insurance Group) or other suppliers who have no connection with the Ecclesiastical Insurance Group. If you wish to contact Ecclesiastical Risk Services Ltd their contact details are as follows:

Tel: 0845 602 4065 Email: ers_ltd@eigmail.com