

Managing work to avoid falls from vehicles

Information sheet WPT05

This information sheet is for people responsible for managing operations, both on their own site and at other locations, such as delivery points.

Why manage work on vehicles?

Three million people in Great Britain work on or near vehicles as part of their regular job. Getting on and off a vehicle to carry out loading/unloading operations and working at height on the vehicle are often viewed as incidental to the main job. Because of this, the risks involved may not be properly considered by both workers and their managers. The economic and human cost of the falls from vehicles that we know about was over £36 million in 2004/05.

Looking at how people work

Careful assessment of the tasks involved and implementation of simple and cost-effective safety controls can reduce the risk of falls from vehicles significantly and avoid potential losses for your company.

The effectiveness of all the solutions described here depends on them being used. You will need to have procedures in place to check that systems of work are being followed.

Consider the following possible solutions:

- Reduce the need for people to go on the load area and catwalk. Correct ordering of the load, so that the position of orders on the load bed matches the order of delivery, reduces the need for drivers to climb on the load (see Information sheet WPT01, listed in Further information at the end of this document).
- Analyse tasks to reduce slips and trips risks. Pushing or pulling loads or manual handling make things worse; you should aim to reduce such activities and minimise the number of times that drivers have to get in and out of the cab and on and off the back of the vehicle.
- Job design can affect the likelihood of people falling from their vehicle, for example 'task and finish' can apply pressures to get the job done. Planning and managing loading and unloading activities with this in mind is an important part of the operation, as is making sure people have the time to do the job safely.
- Task rescheduling can reduce risks if it leads to less rushing by drivers and less tiredness.

- Provide driver training in avoiding slips and trips. Include aspects such as safe access/egress using three points of contact, or not jumping down from the vehicle, which can lead to long-term damage to joints as well as causing strains and sprains.
- Provide drivers with systems to document and report defects with safety equipment, such as steps or catwalks, to management.
- Involve drivers in the selection of new vehicles and other safety equipment such as footwear – they will have first-hand knowledge of the difficulties that are experienced. Feed what you learn from risk assessment and accident investigations into the specification of future vehicles, eg taking account of:
 - the type of load in relation to the type of vehicle;
 - avoiding unnecessary sheeting, resulting in people walking on the loads etc;
 - providing safe access and egress to the vehicle where access is unavoidable;
 - the ease of using handrails and access steps while removing loads.
- Communicate with sites where your drivers will be making deliveries to make sure arrangements are in place to enable safe loading/unloading to take place with minimum risk of falls from vehicles.

Reducing the risk of falls due to contamination

Various **contaminants** are present in the haulage industry. Diesel spills, at filling stations, depots and around the vehicle fuel tank, can result in slippery surfaces. Many drivers report slipping or falling after getting diesel, oil or grease from the fifth wheel on the soles of their footwear or on the areas of the catwalk where they have to walk. Rainwater, snow and ice are also common problems.

Ways of reducing the risk of falls due to contamination include:

- Provide vehicle washing facilities to remove contaminants, such as diesel and mud, which will increase the likelihood of slip incidents.
- Provide convenient disposal facilities for waste packaging, broken pallets etc.
- Carry out periodic checks to ensure vehicles are kept in a good and clean condition.
- Provide drivers with safety footwear which is slip resistant on the surfaces they will be walking on.
- Provide drivers with cleaning equipment to remove contamination from areas of the vehicle where they have to walk and to clean footwear if necessary.

Ensuring a safe environment

Weather conditions can make the driver's job more difficult and hazardous when loading and unloading. An important part of the planning process is to make sure that the effects of bad weather conditions are considered. For example, very high winds may cause people to fall, and rain, ice and snow will make surfaces more slippery.

Lighting should be provided in vehicle depots and on the vehicle. Poor lighting makes it difficult to identify slip and trip hazards. Winter working can involve significant time spent working in the dark, as drivers often start work very early in the morning. Truck loading areas tend to be poorly lit, and uneven ground around the vehicle will present a more significant risk in the dark, for example in accessing the fifth wheel area.

Yard conditions: ensure that yards are even and free from potholes and obstacles, to enable safe access to and egress from the vehicle.

Cleaning/maintenance

Organise safe systems for maintenance work. Consider whether access to height on the vehicle be required for cleaning or maintenance, for example to the engine, plant, load area or gantry. Work at height may be avoidable, for example by asking for underslung refrigeration units on articulated trailers which can be worked at ground level.

If access to height is unavoidable and on-vehicle access is not provided, then you should provide other safe access solutions, such as tower scaffolds, gantries, platforms etc. An example would be for repair or service of refrigerated units on delivery vehicles. If it is not safe to carry out the work off site, because suitable work equipment is not available, arrange for it to be done back at the depot.

Set up safe systems for cleaning the vehicle, for example for sweeping the load area after deliveries. Inform drivers and other workers of these systems.

Have a system for checking that housekeeping standards are being met and that access equipment is clean and in good repair.

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

Preventing slips, trips and falls from vehicles: The basics

WPT01 Information sheet HSE 2007

www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/wpt01.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

Delivering safely: Co-operating to prevent workplace vehicle accidents

WPT06 Information sheet HSE 2007

www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/wpt06.pdf

Preventing falls from vehicles Pocket card INDG413

HSE Books 2007 (single copy free or priced packs of 25)

ISBN 978 0 7176 6256 2)

Web version: www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg413.pdf

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