



Safety in window cleaning using rope access techniques

HSE Information Sheet MISC612

Introduction

This information sheet gives window cleaners guidance on the use of rope access methods and controlling risks. The contents should also be noted by clients, specifiers, managers and contractors.

It has been produced because rope access is increasingly used in window cleaning and it has become clear that not all window-cleaning businesses fully understand the complexities of using this access method.

Because of the limited range of tasks in window cleaning compared with rope access methods across all industries, less breadth of knowledge is required and only simpler rope access skills are generally needed. Nevertheless, full competence in those areas necessary remains crucial, as for all rope access work.

This guidance is not intended to apply to the use of bosun's chairs, although some of the information may be relevant (the use of an additional back-up line, for example).

This document provides summary guidance only. Anyone involved with rope access operations should familiarise themselves with the British Standard Code of Practice BS 7985: 2002: *The use of rope access methods for industrial purposes* (see 'Further reading').

Choice of access method

For any window-cleaning task, in the first instance an assessment should be made to establish whether rope access is an appropriate method for the work. For all work at height, the most intrinsically safe means of access should always be the first consideration. Other safer methods of access, such as cleaning from inside, suspended access equipment or mobile platforms, will often be preferable. In general, the most effective control for any hazard is to eliminate it and only if this is not possible should you then look to control risks to an acceptable level.

General requirements for a safe system of work

Rope access must only be used within a defined system of work. Elements of a safe system will include:

- proper management and planning including risk assessment and supervision;
- use of trained, competent persons;

- selection, maintenance and care of appropriate equipment;
- proper control of working methods, including:
 - use of work equipment,
 - emergency procedures,
 - protection for third parties.

Management and planning

Risk assessment

Factors to be considered include the likely duration of the work, the ease of access, the possibility of using an alternative, safer work method (eg work platform, work from inside the building) and the presence of any hazards.

Management

A nominated person should be identified, who is responsible for managing all aspects of rope access work. The nominated person must have experience and/or training in the type of work the company plans to undertake. Similarly, designated supervisors will be required to directly oversee and direct work in progress on all jobs.

Planning rope access operations

A system of work should be drawn up, taking account of risks from rope access operations generally and job-specific risks that are present and can be foreseen. The safe system should specify rescue arrangements, selection of correct equipment, selection of people with the necessary level of competence and arrangements for control and communication.

Personnel

Competence

A competent person may be defined as someone who is suitably trained or qualified by knowledge and practical experience to enable them to:

- carry out their required duties at the level of responsibility required of them;
- fully understand any potential hazards related to the work under consideration;
- detect any technical defects or omissions in that work, recognise any implications for health and safety, and be able to specify appropriate remedial action as necessary.