

# Fragile Roofs – What you need to know

## For busy builders, contractors and maintenance workers

On average, 9 people a year are killed falling through a fragile roof or roof light. Many others are seriously injured.

These accidents usually happen on roofs of factories, warehouses and farm buildings while repairing, maintaining plant, installing equipment or cleaning gutters and skylights.

If you are going to work on a fragile roof, whether you will be repairing, replacing, cleaning or painting a roof, or working on plant or equipment on a roof, there are a few simple steps you can take to make sure all the work is done safely.

- If you don't know if the roof is fragile, always assume that it is
- Do not go on to a fragile roof, or ask any of your employees to go on to unless you have the skills, experience and equipment to do it safely
- Never assume it is safe to walk the line of bolts above the purlins, or along the ridge
- Always plan the work – even in 'emergency' situations
  - Gather as much information about the roof as you can from the client/owner/occupier for your method statement
  - Visit the site if possible to see the condition of the roof
- If possible, do the work without going onto the roof:
  - sheets/skylights can often be replaced from underneath using a mobile

elevated work platform (MEWP) or tower scaffold

- inspections can be done from ground level or from a MEWP
- gutter cleaning can be done from ground level, a MEWP or a tower scaffold

### A roof can be fragile if there are:

- **Old roof lights;**
- **Non-reinforced fibre cement sheets;**
- **Asbestos cement sheets**
- **Corroded metal sheets;**
- **Glass (including wired glass);**
- **Slates and tiles**

- Stop people and equipment falling from the edge of the roof with handrails, midrails and toeboards, with brick guards if necessary
- Cover or barrier-off skylights to stop people falling through them
- Make sure ladders onto the roof are tied and secure. Consider using tower stair systems
- If you are working on plant/equipment on a fragile roof you still need safe access and a safe working platform with handrails
- If you don't have all the equipment with you to prevent falling off or through the roof – don't improvise

## What can happen if health and safety is ignored?

A 32 year-old man fell through the fragile roof of a warehouse onto a concrete floor more than 14m below. He died at the scene. He had been cleaning the roof, and there were no measures in place to prevent or mitigate against a fall. His employer was prosecuted and fined

## Fee for Intervention

HSE now recovers the costs of time spent dealing with material breaches of health and safety law. This is known as Fee for Intervention (FFI). FFI generally applies when an Inspector finds something wrong that they believe is serious enough for them to write to you about. A fee is charged for the time spent by the Inspector in sorting it out.

Following the simple guidance on this sheet may help you to avoid having to pay a fee.

## Some examples of safe systems of work



Replacing roof-light from below



Using MEWP to inspect a vent



Safety netting protecting rooflights

This is just a summary – you can find out what else you need to know about health and safety at [www.hse.gov.uk/construction](http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction)

GEIS 5 Fragile roofs  
INDG248 (rev1) Working on roofs  
HSG33 Health and safety in roofwork

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[www.wwt.uk.com](http://www.wwt.uk.com)

The Working Well Together campaign aims to improve health and safety in the construction industry, particularly in small and micro businesses. For more information visit

## Further information

For information about health and safety, or to report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance, visit [www.hse.gov.uk/](http://www.hse.gov.uk/). You can view HSE guidance online and order priced publications from the website. HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops.

**This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.**