

Mobile access towers



Mobile access towers are sometimes used in places of worship, for access to carry out maintenance and other tasks at height.

They come in many different sizes and configurations, but are commonly free-standing, mobile and have a platform from which tasks can be completed. More often than not, they are constructed from proprietary components of aluminium.

In places of worship, such equipment is frequently donated, brought along by those offering to help with certain tasks or is cheaply hired. It can offer a practical option for some tasks.

However, mobile access towers can pose a significant risk of injury if they are not used properly. Typically, injury can result from falling when erecting, dismantling or completing tasks from the tower or misusing it causing it to overturn.

Therefore, it is essential that basic safety precautions are taken when they are used.

Legal requirements

Generally, if someone is injured you may need to show that you have met your duty of care.

In addition to this, you may have to comply with other duties set out in the **Work at Height Regulations**. This will be where you are an employer or have control of work completed by others. If you control the work, you will only need to comply with the requirements to the extent of your control. The meaning of 'work' is legally defined.

For work at height completed from mobile access towers, the Regulations broadly require:

Risk Advice Line

Should you have any additional questions on this topic or other risk-related matters, as a valued Ecclesiastical customer you can contact us through our Risk Advice Line on

0345 600 7531

(Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm, excluding bank holidays)

and one of our in-house risk professionals will be able to assist.

Alternatively, you can email us at

risk.advice@ecclesiastical.com

and one of our experts will call you back within 24 hours.

- the organising and planning of such work
- that persons are competent (or supervised by competent persons)
- certain steps to be taken to avoid risk from work at height
- the correct selection and specification of work equipment
- the inspection of certain work equipment and of places of work at height.

Additional requirements might also apply in some circumstances e.g. where work equipment – such as a mobile access tower – is used, the **Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations** would also apply. Also, if the work is construction work, then you may have additional responsibilities under the **Construction (Design and Management) Regulations**. The meaning of 'construction work' is very comprehensive and can include the alteration, renovation, repair, upkeep, redecoration, or other maintenance of a structure.

Hazards to look out for

- Mobile access towers used when safer options would be more appropriate e.g. completing the work from ground level
- Damaged, defective or missing components especially when equipment has been donated or is second-hand e.g. castors with defective brakes, components that are cracked or have broken welds, latching hooks that do not operate etc.
- Equipment erected or dismantled in an unsafe manner
- Equipment incorrectly assembled e.g. on uneven ground, not in accordance with manufacturer's instructions, where design or load capabilities are exceeded, there are missing components etc.
- Stabilisers or outriggers are not used to increase the effective base size in accordance with manufacturer's instructions
- Unsafe access to the platform e.g. a separate access ladder leaning against the outside of the tower, people using horizontal members of end frames for access
- Incomplete platforms with inadequate edge protection i.e. guard-rails and toe-boards
- Equipment is misused e.g. where a ladder or trestle is used on the working platform to extend the height of the tower, exceeding the maximum height or recommended height to least base ratio, moving the tower with people still on the platform
- Unauthorised alterations to equipment e.g. components painted with the potential to hide defects
- Inadequate lighting
- Contact with overhead electricity lines
- Adverse weather making the task at height unsafe (e.g. high winds, snow and ice) *.

*Note: this list is not exhaustive

Precautions you can take

Typical precautions include:

- Avoiding the need for activity at height in the first place (say, completing tasks from ground level)
- Using existing places at height to complete tasks where these are suitable (i.e. they have safe access, protected edges etc.)
- Using specialist assistance where the task is complex or beyond the capability of others
- Ensuring that tasks are properly planned in advance taking account of any safety precautions that are needed
- Choosing mobile access towers that are suitable, meeting recognised standards (e.g. BS EN1004)
- Obtaining the instruction manual from the manufacturer, supplier or hirer so that this can be passed onto those erecting the tower or supervising the task
- Providing relevant information and training on the safe erection, dismantling and use of access equipment where appropriate
- Making sure no task at height is carried out when there are adverse weather conditions
- Making sure equipment is inspected for wear or damage before use, once erected and then periodically thereafter, being properly maintained*.

*Note: this list is not exhaustive



Making a start

Action

1. Identify circumstances where tasks at height may require the use of mobile access towers.

Guidance

Where you are an employer, you will need to complete formal risk assessments. These should help you identify circumstances where tasks at height may require the use of mobile access towers.

2. Check that the use of a mobile access tower is the best option for completing the task.

If you are an employer, the risk assessments you complete should help you with this. Where practicable, it is better to avoid completing tasks at height (e.g., completing them from ground level using extendable tools). This is not always possible in church premises and tower scaffolds might offer a practical solution.

In some instances, it may be more appropriate to leave the tasks to specialists. This will be particularly so if those who are required to erect, inspect, use or dismantle the equipment are not familiar with it.

3. Check the precautions you have taken are adequate. If they are not, identify any additional ones that are needed.

Make a note of the precautions in place and/or any additional ones that might be required.

Also, note who will be responsible for taking them.

Again, where you have completed formal risk assessments, these will do this for you. They will also provide a useful record of the steps you have taken to identify any necessary precautions.

Otherwise, the manufacturers' handbook will provide information on the precautions to be taken when erecting, using or dismantling the equipment and the detail for inspecting and maintaining it. This will need to be followed closely.

Makeshift towers comprising of mixed scaffold components or other access equipment (e.g. independent ladders) with platforms made from pieces of scaffold board or plywood are best avoided.

For mobile access towers, precautions will generally include those required to ensure proper:

- **Selection** – any mobile access tower must be the right for the job and suitable for its intended use. When the tower is purchased, hired or donated it should arrive with all the necessary components to prevent falls and ensure stability. Ideally, they should comply with relevant standards (usually, BS EN1004). Where it is not new, only equipment which has been adequately inspected and properly maintained should be used.
- **Erection/dismantling** – mobile access towers should be erected in a safe manner. This is either by using the **advance guard rail system** [where temporary guard rail units are locked in place from the level below and moved up to the platform level. They are in place before anybody accesses the platform to fit the permanent guard rails] or **'through-the-trap' (3T)** method [involving the operator taking up a working position in the trap door of the platform, from where they can add or remove the components which act as the guard rails on the level above the platform. It is designed to ensure that the operator does not stand on an unguarded platform].

Making a start

Action

Guidance

- **Use** - mobile access towers should be erected and used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. For example, this will involve ensuring the tower is sited on firm, level ground with the locked castors or base plates properly supported; does not exceed the recommended height specified by the manufacturer; is fitted with stabilisers or outriggers when required; has all necessary bracing fitted; has platforms that are fully boarded and provided with adequate guard rails/toe boards; has safe access provided to the platform etc.
- **Maintenance** – mobile access towers must be properly maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Unauthorised alterations of the equipment should be prevented with defects being reported and repaired promptly. Equipment needs to be adequately stored when not in use.

4. Ensure that the precautions you have identified are taken and remain in place for as long as is necessary.

Make a note of any checks or inspections you make to ensure these precautions are being taken or equipment remains safe.

Where mobile access towers are used, you may also need other precautions to guard against falling materials or objects; prevent unauthorised access to 'work' areas; provide adequate lighting; ensure safety around overhead services and/or equipment etc.

Ensure that any necessary checks are completed before each use and then periodically thereafter in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

In some instances, more formal checks may be required, and further information is available [here](#).

5. Ensure that tower scaffolds will not be used when weather conditions make this unsafe.

6. Ensure that users know how to erect, dismantle and use tower scaffolds safely.

Make a note of any information or training that is provided to individuals.

The level of information and training required will vary depending on the type of equipment used, the nature of the work undertaken and your particular circumstances. If you have completed formal risk assessments, these will help you determine what is necessary.

If purchasing or hiring the equipment, make sure that a copy of the manufacturer's instruction manual is obtained. This should explain the erection/dismantling sequence, any bracing requirements and other related safe use instructions. This information must be passed on to those required to erect, inspect, use, dismantle, repair or maintain the equipment.

Those required to erect, inspect, use, dismantle, repair or maintain mobile access towers must be sufficiently competent and physically able to do this safely. This may involve the provision of specific information and training in some circumstances.

Making a start

Action

7. Document your arrangements and responsibilities for using mobile access towers.

Review these where necessary, particularly if you suspect that they are no longer valid.

Retain records of the notes you have made in the steps outlined above.

Guidance

If you are required to prepare a health and safety policy, record these as part of it. Otherwise, simple evidence of what you have done will suffice.

In the event of a claim, evidence of what you have done may be important. So, where towers are used, you should retain the notes mentioned. Where you prepare other documentation, you should keep these as well. This could include **information gathered at the scene of the accident** (e.g., sketches/photographs; witness statements); **investigation documents** (e.g., accident book); or **specific health and safety documents** (e.g., risk assessments; records of maintenance, inspections and other checks; records of information and training provided; policy etc.)

Want to know more?

We have produced other useful resources to help you get started or simply check the adequacy of what you have already done. All are available at

www.ecclesiastical.com/risk-management/

This includes further information on **working at height** and using **ladders** in places of worship.

Guidance is also available from the HSE at: www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/index.htm in particular the information on using **mobile access towers**.

Other useful resources on the safe use of tower scaffolds are available from the **Prefabricated Access Suppliers' and Manufacturers' Association [PASMA]**.

Note: if you are in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey or the Isle of Man, then regional variations might apply. In this instance, you should check the guidance provided by the Enforcing Agency for your region. This will be freely available on their website.

Need to contact us?

If you would like to speak to someone about this topic call or e-mail us on: **0345 600 7531** (Monday to Friday, 09.00 to 17.00 - excluding Bank Holidays) or you can e-mail us at risk.advice@ecclesiastical.com

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