

Question

When is using a ladder in a vehicle workshop an acceptable option these days?

Answer

Not often!!

Recently introduced regulations (*The Work at Height Regulations 2005 – updated 2007*) have made it a requirement for companies to demonstrate that, if a ladder is to be used in a place of work, three essential criteria must be met:

1. the ladder should only be used for a short duration.
2. any risk associated with the work to be done is low.
3. there is no practical, safer method of working available.

In the majority of Commercial Vehicle Repair and Maintenance facilities, and particularly Body and Paint Shops, the probability is that none of these three criteria is met, let alone all three, so the use of a ladder would not be a sensible option for management if they are to fulfil their duty of care to employees.

Where high-sided vehicles are being repaired, maintained or painted as a matter of routine, the need to get access to height is clearly not of short duration. Furthermore employees will be required to work at height for considerable periods of time – that's most probably what they have been employed to do!



Almost 50% of all accidents involving falls from height in which people are injured or killed are from heights of less than 2 metres, so it is not valid for employers to claim that the heights are modest and therefore the risk is low. Furthermore maintenance and repair staff are often equipped with personal protective equipment that may impair their vision, and carrying tools, parts or

spray-guns and trailing air hoses or electrical cables behind them. All of these factors add to the risk in a non-linear manner. Assuming that a ladder has been chosen as a suitable piece of work equipment, having climbed it the operative will often want to be able to access as much area as possible before coming down to move the ladder along (here comes the next uncontrolled risk!). The obvious temptation is for the operative to lean out and reach as far as he or she can. So there they are, two or three metres up, balancing on a ladder with one hand full and air hoses or cables pulling against them, with limited vision and leaning out as far as they can reach – can you as the manager or owner of the business really claim that the risk is low or, more importantly, that you didn't know that this is a normal working practice in your workshop?

The good news is that there are practical, safer alternatives. There are numerous more suitable access systems than a ladder, many designed specifically for use in workshops. Two such are WALL-MAN® and LIFTMAN™ platforms, both powered by compressed air to eliminate ignition risks and the danger of contamination of any paint finish by hydraulic oil. Both units provide an enclosed working platform for the operative with handrails all around, auto close safety gates and other ergonomic features that make the job easier. In both cases movement can be achieved in two or three directions, simultaneously if required, using the 'in-basket' controls without having to come down to ground level and re-position, as is the case with many other types of platform and definitely with ladders. Both LIFTMAN™ and WALL-MAN® enable users to meet all current legislation and with approaching 1,500 units in use world-wide they are a proven method of providing safe and efficient access for commercial vehicle repair, maintenance and painting.



So however long your ladders are, the chances are that their useful safe working life is probably a lot shorter than you thought!

For more information on WALL-MAN® and LIFTMAN™ contact:

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