

St. John's Church Southbourne
Ladders & Working at Height Policy

May 2025

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Introduction

St. John's recognizes that it is sometimes necessary for staff, volunteers, and trustees to work at height, and have put this document in place to give clear guidance and improve safety for all. This policy covers all working at height, as well as the use, inspection, and maintenance of access equipment. This policy also applies to all visitors, guests and others, excluding specifically appointed contractors. Contractors are expected to have their own risk management in place.

Working at Height – Overview

Working at height means work in any place where, if there were no precautions in place, a person could fall a distance liable to cause personal injury. For example you are working at height if you:

- are working on a ladder or a flat roof;
- could fall through a fragile surface;
- could fall into an opening in a floor or a hole in the ground.

Before working at height you must work through these simple steps:

- avoid work at height where it is reasonably practicable to do so;
- where work at height cannot be avoided, prevent falls using either an existing place of work that is already safe or the right type of equipment;
- minimise the distance and consequences of a fall, by using the right type of equipment where the risk cannot be eliminated.

Everyone should:

- do as much work as possible from the ground;
- ensure workers can get safely to and from where they have to work at height;
- ensure equipment is suitable, stable and strong enough for the job, maintained and checked regularly;
- make sure you don't overload or overreach when working at height;
- take precautions when working on or near fragile surfaces;
- provide protection from falling objects;
- consider your emergency evacuation and rescue procedures.

Use of Ladders and Similar – Overview

The law says that ladders can be used for work at height when a risk assessment has shown that using equipment offering a higher level of fall protection is not justified because of the low risk and short duration of use; or there are existing workplace features which cannot be altered.

Short duration is not the deciding factor in establishing whether use of a ladder is acceptable or not – you should have first considered the risk. As a guide, if your task would require staying up a leaning ladder or stepladder for more than 30 minutes at a time, it is recommended that you consider alternative equipment.

You should only use ladders in situations where they can be used safely, eg where the ladder will be level and stable, and where it is reasonably practicable to do so, the ladder can be secured.

To use a ladder you need to be competent, ie have had instruction and understand how to use the equipment safely. The church policy for training should be followed

Before starting a task, you should always carry out a 'pre-use' check to spot any obvious visual defects to make sure the ladder is safe to use.

A pre-use check should be carried out:

- by the user;
- at the beginning of the working day;
- after something has changed, eg a ladder has been dropped or moved from a dirty area to a clean area (check the state or condition of the feet).

Check the stiles (side part of ladder) – make sure they are not bent or damaged, as the ladder could buckle or collapse.

Check the feet – if they are missing, worn or damaged the ladder could slip. Also check ladder feet when moving from soft/dirty ground (eg dug soil, loose sand/ stone, a dirty workshop) to a smooth, solid surface (eg paving slabs), to make sure the foot material and not the dirt (eg soil, chippings or embedded stones) is making contact with the ground.

Check the rungs – if they are bent, worn, missing or loose the ladder could fail. Check any locking mechanisms – if they are bent or the fixings are worn or damaged the ladder could collapse. Ensure any locking bars are engaged.

Check the stepladder platform – if it is split or buckled the ladder could become unstable or collapse. Check the steps or treads on stepladders – if they are contaminated they could be slippery; if the fixings are loose on steps, they could collapse. If you spot any of the above defects, don't use the ladder and notify the appointed person.

St. John's has provided a range of suitable steps and step ladders, which can only be used by those who have read this document, the 'working at height risk assessment' and signed the 'working at height register'

Working at Height – St. John’s Church Policy:

- No member of staff, volunteer, or trustee should ever work more than 1m off the ground, except the one named Property Maintenance Technician who may work up to 3m off the ground.
- Everyone who wishes to carry out work at height (less than 1m) must have read this document, the ‘working at height risk assessment’ and signed the ‘working at height register’. They must also read the ladder safety section of the HSE website: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/work-at-height/ladders/index.htm>
- Only approved ladders, steps and similar are to be used – user to visually check equipment and work area before use and discontinue task if any issue is suspected or found
- A dynamic risk assessment of the task and equipment is to be carried out before each task is started
- Tasks requiring working at a height of over 1m should only be completed by an approved contractor. Should there be a requirement for working above 1m that can not be done in another way or given to a contractor, the standing committee must be consulted and will make a decision based on current policy and risk.
- When working at height a second suitable person must be present and nearby
- All parties working at height must be fit and suitable to do so
- People in key positions must undertake additional working at height and/or ladder training as the need dictates. This may be online or face to face.

Ladders, Steps & Similar – St. John’s Church Policy

- All ladders, steps and similar must be approved for use in the church premises and grounds, by the approved person and the standing committee. All units must be of a suitable type and meet current regulation
- All ladders, steps and similar are to be stored in a safe and secure manner
- All ladders, steps and similar are managed and inspected by a named person on a monthly basis, or before if there has been a change
- Ladders, steps and similar are to be removed and disposed of if defects are found
- The provision of any ancillary equipment that may be necessary in the safe use of ladders, such as stand-offs, ladder ties, mats etc will be reviewed by the approved person and the standing committee to ensure that the most suitable equipment is available and to ensure that work using ladders can be conducted without risk to safety as far as is reasonably practicable
- Everyone who wishes to use a ladder or similar must have read this document, the ‘working at height risk assessment’ and signed the ‘working at height register’. They must also read the ladder safety section of the HSE website.
- The approved person will undertake suitable working at height and ladder inspection training, with periodic refresh/retraining as guided by HSE
- When working with a ladder, steps or similar a second suitable person must be present nearby. Access to a mobile or land line telephone is essential
- All parties working with ladders, steps or similar must be fit and suitable to do so, and between the ages of 18 and 70. Should a situation arise where this cannot be implemented the standing committee must be consulted before the task is undertaken

- ## Ladder Inspection Record

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Working at Height Register

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