



# Working at Height Stairwells

**Audience:** Site Operatives

**Presenter:** GHSEA, Site Manager, Trade Supervisors



## Working in and Around Stairwells

An open stairwell is a potential fall from height if no fall protection has been put in place. There are numerous incidents across the construction industry which have resulted in serious injuries to individuals from falls or materials falling down stairwells.

By following the points below this will help to minimise these incidents.



## Forming the stairwell opening

When the flooring is laid, a sacrificial floor is laid over the stairwell opening, usually with a trap hatch to access the floor to install and remove fall protection measures.

The site manager must ensure that the method used is suitable.

Access to the floors above ground floor must be with a secured ladder at this stage



## Opening the stairwell and fitting the stairs

Before the stairwell is opened, a proprietary stairwell protection system must be fitted to prevent a fall (edge protection) when the sacrificial flooring is removed.

Never work on a floor with an open stairwell which has no edge protection.

Edge protection should consist of metal posts with double guard rails around the opening and a handrail lining the open stairs. Toe boards should also be installed.

When fitting the stairwell edge protection, each hole in the footplate of the post must be suitably secured using appropriate screws – Drywall screws are not considered suitable.

The hand rails should be 4"X2" and they should be screwed in position. Service batten must not be used.

The edge protection must be secure and strong enough to prevent operatives falling through.

Using the newel posts to nail pieces of timber for edge protection is bad practice and should be avoided.

The stairwell edge protection must be stepped back from the stairwell opening in order that the baluster rail on the landing and the bulkhead/ stud wall can be installed with the protection in place.

The site managers must check that the proprietary stairwell system has been installed correctly and complete the stairwell protection inspection register



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## Installing a second flight of stairs

When the build requires 3 stories or more the same process (above) of opening up the second stairwell is followed.

Carpenters must ensure that fall protection is put in place over the stairwell opening for the first floor. This could be done by putting in a bird cage scaffold, replacing the sacrificial stairwell covering or using the Oxford Landing System, if the latter is used then it must not be overloaded.

No work is to be carried out over an open first floor stairwell.

Stairwell edge protection must only be removed after discussion with the site manager and the implementation of suitable controls to reduce risk (carry out a risk assessment).

Internal trades must use proprietary stairwell platforms when working above stairs (painters/taper and jointer)

Dry liners must make provision for loading out plaster boards, some examples are:

- Manually handle the boards up the stairs
- Cut letterboxes
- Load boards onto loading bays and pass through window openings

All of the above require assessment

Temporary stairwell edge protection in traditional flats and apartments should be assessed in each case but will usually consist of scaffold.