

## **Guarding of staircases and landing – some contractors still failing to meet basic standards**

Health and Safety inspectors carry out unannounced visits to construction sites throughout the year. These visits are usually focussed on a particularly topic, such as work at height but inspectors will also deal with any other issues which they identify during the visit.

It was identified during the last few months of 2007 that the guarding of stairs and landings is an issue which many contractors, both large and small were still failing to properly manage. This was exposing persons who were working in areas above ground floor level to a risk of serious personal injury. These observations were made in all types of structure, from steel frame to timber frame and were evident during both renovation and new-build projects.

In response to this, a number of focussed inspections were carried out in early 2008 to review the standards in the industry. The photographs below illustrate some of the poor practices identified which required immediate attention due to the risks involved. Although in these examples, the handrails had clearly never been fitted, in many instances it was identified that handrails had been removed to enable the transfer of materials etc. but had not been put back once this was complete.



In addition to internal staircases and landings, it is necessary to give the same consideration to those which are external, which is often lacking, as demonstrated by the photographs below.



The legal requirements relating to the guarding of stairs are contained in Part 10 of the Construction (Safety Provisions)(Jersey) Regulations 1970, a guide to which is available on this website under 'Guidance on Legislation - Law and Regulations'. In essence, stairs and landings must be guarded to prevent persons from falling from any edge and in circumstances where handrails are removed, such as to allow the movement of materials, they must be put back as soon as this work is finished.

If the opening for the stairs is not used as a means of access, then ideally it should be boarded over in a suitable manner. In such cases, it is essential that the boards are secure and adequately supported from below. This has the added advantage that it provides a safe working platform from which work to the walls forming the stairwell can be carried out. If the stairwell is used as a means of access, then either handrails should be erected to the exposed edges (except where persons are gaining access to and from the ladder) or the opening can be boarded over to reduce the size of the opening, as shown below. It should be noted that where ladders are used for access, they must extend 3 feet 6 inches above the landing place unless there is another suitable handhold available

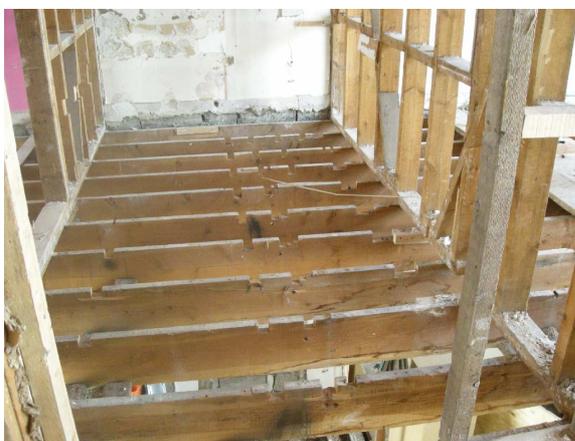


As well as managing the presence of these openings in floors, work to the walls of the stairwell also poses a particular problem for contractors in terms of safe access. It is vital that the sequence of works is carefully considered and the system of work used is properly planned. Unfortunately, the arrangement shown in the photograph below is all too common. This is entirely unacceptable and action will be taken where this type of practice is observed.



It was a similar practice to this, approximately 2 years ago, which resulted in an individual sustaining severe injuries including a fractured skull when the ladder slipped. The employer was successfully prosecuted for failing to provide a safe system of work but the repercussions were far greater for the individual, who was absent from work for several months and unable to take part in the social activities he enjoyed.

Some positive findings in respect of the guarding of stairwells were identified during the focused inspections and also evidence of good practice was observed on a number of the sites visited. However, on at least two sites, serious issues regarding work at height were identified as shown below.



Persons observed working in both of these areas were immediately stopped and the failure to manage these works constituted a breach of health and safety legislation which exposed the individuals concerned to a risk of serious personal injury.

The legislation which sets out the standard of protection which should be provided to persons in scenarios such as those shown above has been in force since 1970. It is nearly 40 years since the introduction of this, yet some contractors are still failing to manage this risk properly resulting in the persons who are being injured paying a very high price!

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