

# Health & safety guidance for voluntary bat roost visitors: working at height and use of ladders

## What about working at height?

Many roost visits will include working at height. This might involve using your own ladders, those supplied to you by NE or those of the householder / owner / caretaker if they have means of access to their own loft space / attic, or to the bell tower / spire or other part of a church. It is also important to recognise fragile roofs can also pose a significant hazard as they could also involve a significant fall from height.

## What are the hazards?

- Falls:
  - from equipment such as ladders, or
  - through fragile roofs, or
  - through loft hatches, access points.
- Manual handling of the ladder - see the Natural England [‘Manual Handling’ Technical Information Note](#) for guidance on this.

## Managing the risks of falling from height

- Avoid working at height where possible.
- Check you have the right skills and training.
- Check you have the right equipment and can work safely.

## Avoid where possible

Consider if it is possible to complete the inspection from looking at the exterior of the roost - perhaps using binoculars or cameras / endoscopy to capture evidence from the ground.

Due to the risks involved, legislation restricts the use of ladders and stepladders. They may only be used for:

- tasks that are low-risk and short-duration (15 to 30 minutes maximum);
- low-risk tasks where site features prevent the use of safer alternatives; or
- temporary access purposes.

## Right skills and training

Training on ‘Working at height’ is available to Natural England VBRVs on the Skillport online learning system via the [VBRV Training page](#) of the Natural England website.

## Right equipment & safe working arrangements

High risk areas may require additional safety measures such as the use of temporary barriers or fall arrest equipment. Do not use equipment you are unfamiliar with.

You need to plan your visit to ensure that you have a safe means of access.

## Health & safety guidance for voluntary bat roost visitors: working at height and use of ladders

### Ladders

Surveyor's ladders should be manufactured to the EN131 standard – this means they are rated for professional rather than domestic use.

There is a [ladder checklist](#) to help you think through safe ladder use, addressing their condition, the task, the work environment and how to store them safely.

You should only use a ladder where a risk assessment demonstrates:

- You are using the right type of ladder for the task and it is in good condition.
- The task is low risk – for example, doing a visual inspection.
- The task is short duration – no more than 15 to 30 minutes depending on the task being performed. You can resume the operation after a suitable break if necessary.
- Features on site, which cannot be changed, mean other more suitable equipment cannot be deployed safely or effectively.
- A handhold is available on the ladder or step ladder.
- You can maintain three points of contact on the ladder (hands and feet) at the working position.
- The ladder is on firm ground or the load is spread (for example, using a board).
- The ladder is on level ground.
- You can tie or secure the ladder.

Where you are using the householder's / owner's / caretaker's means of access:

- Assess its condition before use.
- Ask about the space you are about to enter: Is there a light? Are there boards to walk / crawl on and are they in good condition? Are there areas to avoid?
- Consider what you would fall on to - might that increase the risk of severe injury?

### Reporting an incident

You must report any accident, near miss or incident which occurs whilst performing or

travelling to / from a roost visit to Natural England as soon as possible:

- Contact the Natural England 'near miss and incident reporting line' at any time on 0300 060 0100.
- If the incident results in injury to another person or damage to property please also contact: Martin Rhodes 0300 060 2676, or Lucy Foster 0300 060 0666.

### Feedback

If you have any feedback about this guidance or would like to see additions / amendments please get in touch by emailing:

[batvolunteers@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:batvolunteers@naturalengland.org.uk).

### Further information

For more guidance about working in lofts and attics please read the Natural England '[Restricted spaces](#)' [Technical Information Note](#).

For more guidance on assessing risks see the Natural England '[Risk management](#)' [Technical Information Note](#).

Please see our website page and other VBRV health and safety leaflets at:

[Health and safety for voluntary bat roost visitors](#)  
[Publications for voluntary bat roost visitors](#)

Natural England Technical Information Notes are available to download from the Natural England website: [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk).

For further information contact the Natural England Enquiry Service on 0300 060 0863 or e-mail [enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk).

## Health & safety guidance for voluntary bat roost visitors: working at height and use of ladders

### Copyright

This note is published by Natural England under the Open Government Licence for public sector information. You are encouraged to use, and reuse, information subject to certain conditions. For details of the licence visit

[www.naturalengland.org.uk/copyright/](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/copyright/). If any

information such as maps or data cannot be used commercially this will be made clear within the note.

© **Natural England 2014**

ISBN 978-1-78354-082-2