

The NASC is recognised as the national trade association for access and scaffolding in the UK.

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## **The NASC launches a Free Interim Guidance Note on Collective Protection when working with Scaffolding**

In the last decade, it is generally accepted that the scaffolding industry has moved forward in leaps and bounds regarding its approach and performance in relation to Health & Safety. This would not have been possible without the help and co-operation of the industry's key stakeholders – the National Access & Scaffolding Confederation (NASC), Main Contractors Group (MCG) and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). There are 29 different NASC safety guidance notes in circulation available to members (who account for over 75% of the annual scaffold spend within the UK) and also to non-members.

In 2000, with co-operation of the HSE, the NASC published safety guidance note 4 (SG4:00) 'The Use of Fall Arrest Equipment whilst erecting, altering & dismantling scaffolding'. The guidance note was revised and reissued in 2005 (SG4:05) 'Preventing Falls in Scaffolding & Falsework'. This coincided with the release of the Work at Height Regulations (WAHR). At the time it was not felt by stakeholders that collective protection measures for the scaffolding industry were sufficiently advanced or generally available to eliminate at least some reliance on fall arrest equipment.

The SG4 guidance was adopted immediately by scaffolding contractors, main contractors and the HSE as the benchmark for safe systems of work for all scaffold contractors, (NASC members or otherwise). Since its introduction in 2000 over 130,000 SG4 user guides have been issued throughout the UK and mainland Europe. The NASC is rightly proud that the SG4 series of guidance notes has had a dramatic impact on the industry's safety performance in relation to falls from

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height by scaffolders. Since its introduction in 2000 the NASC has seen a 40% reduction in the number of falls recorded from a scaffold/working platform - from 27 in 2001 to 17 in 2007. This reduction is in spite of a 17.5% increase in the number of operatives working within the NASC membership, from 11950 in 2001 to 14029 in 2007. During this period, no fatal accident occurred whilst operatives were working within the requirements of SG4 safe systems of work.

The NASC and HSE are in agreement that the tunnelling principle, which is featured in SG4:05 should be phased out at the next revision in 2010. However both parties accept that this practice can continue until then. The NASC reviews its guidance notes every 5 years unless there are any major changes in legislation, this allows the industry to 'bed in' new guidance. Any more frequent revisions and the NASC and HSE agree that the industry would be in a constant state of change and transition.

However, as with any other type of access equipment the erection, dismantling or alteration of scaffolding must comply with the Work at Height regulations and its hierarchy of controls followed. This requires those in control of the work to follow a simple hierarchy that is determined via a risk assessment requiring the employer to consider:

### **Avoiding work at height where possible**

Such as pre-assembled guard-rails, fixed and lifted directly into position

### **Preventing falls**

Use of work equipment or other measures to prevent falls, where they cannot avoid working at height, such as powered access equipment or forward/advanced guardrail systems.

### **Mitigating distances and consequences of a fall**

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Where the risk of a fall cannot be completely eliminated consider the use of work equipment or other measures to mitigate the distance and consequences of a fall, should one occur.

In the 3 year period that has followed the introduction of the latest version of SG4 (SG4:05) collective protection measures have developed considerably in terms of technology, choice, availability, cost, and probably most importantly, have become more user friendly. As the scaffolding industry's recognised trade association with an ethos of promoting 'best practice', the NASC felt it was necessary to release interim guidance (ahead of the planned revision of SG4 in 2010) highlighting the availability and the benefits that can be derived when utilising collective protection measures by its members and the wider industry.

In January 2008 the NASC Health & Safety Committee set up a working party comprising of Health & Safety practitioners and scaffolding contractors to look at and assess **ALL** of the different methods of collective protection available in the current market place and to produce with input from the HSE, an unbiased and informative document clearly identifying employers responsibilities and the options currently available to them, including the various benefits to be derived from these measures and where relevant, their limitations. **This interim guidance has now been distributed to all NASC members, the MCG, HSE and can also be downloaded free of charge by any interested parties from the NASC website – [www.nasc.org.uk](http://www.nasc.org.uk)**

It is important to recognise that whatever system of collective protection is adopted, the employer must ensure that all employees using such equipment are correctly trained in the application of the selected system and ensure that refresher training is carried out as appropriate. Manufacturers of all available systems have a responsibility for producing a safe system of work for the product they sell. However, even with these very positive advances in developing

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technology, it is still the view of the NASC & HSE that scaffolders will still be required to wear suitable fall arrest equipment at all times whilst working because of the tasks associated with moving working platforms, undertaking alterations and performing non standard tasks such as fitting ladder/unit beams etc. Perhaps with new innovations and technology, the real challenge is for manufacturers of collective protection equipment to produce new kit that truly satisfies the requirements of the WAHR!

**Kevin Ward**

NASC Health and Safety Committee, Chairman.

[ends]

**Note to Editors:**

The NASC (National Access and Scaffolding Confederation) accounts for whose operatives account for an estimated 50% of the qualified scaffolder workforce. Members are regulated and must meet the NASC objectives of maintaining and developing best practice throughout the scaffolding industry. Membership is strict and reinforced with an initial and then subsequent audit every 2 years to ensure compliance.

The recognition of the NASC's work continues to be acknowledged and the requirement for only NASC members to be contracted for scaffolding projects within the UK is becoming more and more popular.

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