

# Special Report

## 11 things you MUST KNOW before you employ a scaffold company

With so many regulations, Health & Safety Executive (HSE) prosecutions and so many cowboy scaffold companies out there, it's easy to make a costly mistake when choosing a scaffold firm.

Armed with this "inside info" you'll be in the know and confident that you're choosing a reputable scaffolder, potentially saving you thousands of pounds in lost production, HSE fines and contra-charges from other subbies waiting for your scaffolders to suitably adapt the scaffold.

The provision of a safe place of work is required by law. Obviously, working at height can be a risk and unsafe, so it's worth giving a brief **background to Working at Height** before considering this report. The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) is committed to reducing falls from heights. Latest figures show that 46 people died from a fall from height at work in 2005/06. This is the lowest number on record, but falls from height remain the most common kind of accident causing fatal injuries. The number of people who have suffered major injury as a result of a fall has also reduced, from 3799 in 2004/05 to 3351 in 2005/06. Guidance is available to help employers and workers avoid falls from height in their workplace. More info can be found in at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/pdf/fallsqa.pdf> . The relevant legislation relating to falls is The Work at Height Regulations 2005 <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg401.pdf> .

What does it matter to you if the scaffold's safe? The Health & Safety at Work Act <http://www.safetymatters.org/REGS/HASAWA.htm> makes it quite clear that the duty holder has responsibilities for employees, subcontractors, visitors or any person(s) using the premises – so, basically, everyone! In simple laymen's terms, this means – if the scaffold is to be used in a non-domestic place – you have a duty to ensure the scaffold is installed, maintained, inspected and dismantled in a safe way.

So, here are the 11 things you must know

### 1. Make sure your proposed scaffold company is a member of the National Access & Scaffolding Confederation (NASC) - <http://www.nasc.org.uk/welcome.shtml>

NASC is the national representative employers organisation for the access and scaffolding Industry and membership now accounts for a significant share of the UK's total Industry workload. NASC operates a strict policy of full compliance to all new legislation and has its own code of conduct. This separates the confederation membership from the rest of the industry. Through the NASC annual membership audit the confederation ensures that NASC members uphold best practice as professionals. This means that the NASC do not look for shortcuts on safety, which could put lives at risk.

Check if your proposed scaffolding contractor is a member of the NASC by searching here [http://www.nasc.org.uk/our\\_members/home.php](http://www.nasc.org.uk/our_members/home.php).

**“Through the NASC annual membership audit the confederation ensures that NASC members uphold **best practice** as professionals”**

Members are subject to an annual external 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Audit to establish that safety and service standards are maintained and being improved on.

**2. Get 9, ring 3! A guide to references** – The best way of checking on a company is to ask those who have used them. Any decent company can give you at least 9 previous projects, from which you should pick at least 3 and ask the following

**“.. if they’re **confident** in their previous work they should have no problems..”**

- Were they safe?
- Did they install the scaffold on-time?
- Did the people using the scaffold say if felt safe and suitable?
- Were the scaffolders’ on-site co-operative and friendly?
- Were there hidden “extras” (such as extra hire, ladders etc)?
- Was the equipment in good order?
- Did they do any damage to the property?

**And finally, THE most crucial question of them all...**

- ...would you recommend them and use them again?

Getting references will make the cowboys run a mile! It may sound a bit cheeky to ask the scaffolder to provide a list of 9 previous jobs, but if they’re confident in their previous work they should have no problems with this. If they’re reluctant, then something is wrong. Be careful!

**3. Insurances; its Law** – It is a mandatory requirement that every firm carries Employer’s Liability (EL) insurance and (whilst not mandatory) it would be a foolish move to allow a contractor on your site without any Public Liability (PL). PL & EL insurances are the absolute minimum. These insurances can be verified by the production of Insurances Certificate(s); check the company’s name is correct and that they are current – *(the “to” and “from” dates should be shown, and an expiry date will always be shown)*.

**“Be aware, there is an  
under-hand way of obtaining  
these insurance certificates...”**

*\*\*Be aware, there is an under-hand way of obtaining these insurance certificate by taking annual insurance, spreading the costs over a 12-month period, getting the certificates and then cancelling the payment plan before the 1<sup>st</sup> instalment – & hey presto, you have the certificate ... but are not insured. It's easy to check the validity of insurances by getting the Certificate, then ringing the Insurance Broker (details are normally on the certificate) or the Insurer direct.*

If this all sounds a bit of a faff; stick with it. In the event of an accident, it's going to be a whole lot easier dealing with a reputable insurer rather than trying to sue an individual. And a company being coy about their insurance details should have you smelling a rat.

### **And, while we're talking insurance**

Make sure you get proof of the scaffold firms' vehicle insurance as you don't want your new car driven over by a 10ton scaffold truck and find that you have to claim off your own insurance.

**4. Quality – get them to prove it.** Given that you (or your subcontractors) are going to rely on this scaffold to give them a safe place of work, it is imperative that you check the quality is up to scratch.

Most company's have now gone down the road of having their systems checked by authorised, competent & qualified 3<sup>rd</sup> party quality auditors in order to gain the ISO:9001:2000 Quality Accreditation ([http://www.iso.org/iso/en/iso9000-14000/understand/selection\\_use/selection\\_use.html](http://www.iso.org/iso/en/iso9000-14000/understand/selection_use/selection_use.html)).

### **What is ISO9001:2000?**

In a nutshell, the ISO website gives this general outline of the quality standard

**“ISO 9001:2000 specifies requirements for a quality management system for any organization that needs to demonstrate its ability to consistently provide product that meets customer and applicable regulatory requirements and aims to enhance customer satisfaction. ISO 9001:2000 has been organized in a user-friendly format with terms that are easily recognized by all business sectors. The standard is used for certification/registration and contractual purposes by organizations seeking recognition of their quality management system.”**

ISO:9001 accreditation means the holder gets a certificate with a registration number on it. Get the scaffolder to show you their quality certificate and ring the assessing organisation (it'll be shown on the cert) to make sure it's still current.

**5. Get a written quote. A good one.** – and make sure it details in writing the following

- Dimensions.
- The number of lifts of scaffold that require to be boarded. (Generally scaffold lifts are 2.00m high). There is an important (and expensive) difference between lifts (non-working) and boarded-lifts (working).
- The period of hire – make sure you only pay for hire once the structure is ready to be used (usually called the “handover”). Get a handover certificate from the scaffolder which clearly identifies the date ready for use.
- Any alterations for follow on trades (brickies, roofers, glaziers, etc).
- The period of time in which it will take to install and remove the structure.
- The number of ladders (you may require on each elevation, etc)...
- ..and most importantly make sure that they state that the installation process, the scaffold materials and the handed-over ready-for-use scaffold structure complies with the current Health & Safety Law, best practices and British/European standards.

Any reputable company will want to visit the site first, or have detail drawings, before committing to final quotation (it's not unusual for budget quotation to be given on a “blind” basis). Make sure your proposed firm has visited the site before you place an order so they can take all allowances into consideration).

**6. Check their safety culture** – Ask for proof of competency for the scaffolders that will do the work. All competent scaffolders will be registered on the Construction Industry Scaffolders Record Scheme <http://www.citb-constructionskills.co.uk/cardschemes/whatcardschemesareavailable/certificationschemes/cisrs.asp#TopOfPage> known as the CISRS (or “scissors”) card.

Don't let the work start until you have had sight of the ORIGINAL scaffolders CISRS “scissors” card.

They look like this (see next page)



**“...phone the CITB Records department on **01485 577577** and give them the 8-digit identification number across the front”**

### **CISRS “Scissor” cards – CHECK they’re not forgeries**

Also, you can contact the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) directly to ensure the card is not a forgery (and be aware – there are **MANY** forgeries about). All you have to do is phone the CITB Records department on **01485 577577** and give them the 8-digit identification number across the front. They will tell you if it's authentic or a forgery.

## What about Managers & Supervisors?

Also, check the firm's managers have had some sort of formal Health & Safety training. Any manager, supervisor or persons visiting a construction site or involved in Construction should have at least sat the CITB Health & Safety Test <http://www.citb-constructionskills.co.uk/healthsafety/thehealthsafetytest/>. The record of training for Managers and Supervisors (and a host of other trades) is run by via the Construction Skills Certification Scheme <http://www.cscs.uk.com/> also known as CSCS Cards.

For example, the Project Manager (Construction) Industry Accreditation Card looks like this

Black contracts manager card for NVQ/SVQ 5 achievers or industry accreditation



**7. Ask to see the Health & Safety (H&S) Policy** – Under the Health & Safety at Work Act (HASAWA) 1974 it is a requirement that any company that employs more than 5 persons has their arrangements for H&S laid down in writing.

Now - contrary to current trends & (some) opinions – this doesn't need to be a huge manual that requires several folders to contain it. It simply has to be the company's workable arrangements for satisfying their H&S requirements under the HASAWA.

It should have details of;

- **POLICY** – dated and signed by the specific Director responsible for H&S.
- **ORGANISATION** – showing who does what and where responsibilities lie.
- **PROCEDURE** – detailing how things actually “work” within the company.
- **MANAGEMENT** – showing how these procedures are managed.
- **REVIEW** – There must be a mechanism and evidence that the Policy is subject to review (a check of the date on the Policy may provide evidence of this).
- **AUDIT** – The Policy must be subject to an Audit (if the firm is a member of [NASC](#) this will be reviewed at the annual Audit)

What you're looking for when viewing the H&S Policy is clear, concise, detailed arrangements for the company's H&S affairs. It is as simple as that. Be aware that many companies go on the Net and simply rip-off another H&S Policy, so keep an eye out for irrelevant sections within the Policy (why would a scaffold company have a huge section concerning electricity in the work place for example).

**8. Scaffolders must comply with SG:4.05. What is it?** As we've established, falls from height account for around half the fatal accidents in construction and therefore scaffolders are regularly at risk from falling when erecting and dismantling scaffolding.

As a means of reducing this risk the NASC provides guidance on safe systems of work for scaffolding operations. A prime example of this is SG4:00 which was published in 2000 to promote safer working methods for scaffolding contractors.

When the NASC published SG4:00, Kevin Myers (HM Chief Inspector of Construction) commented that there was scope for the guidance to evolve as fall prevention technology developed further. Five years later the NASC has published a completely revised and expanded version of the guidance entitled *SG4:05 Preventing Falls in Scaffolding and Falsework*. The revised guidance gives particular consideration to product innovations in fall prevention technology introduced during the intervening period for use in conjunction with the hierarchy of control for determining how to work at height safely as set out in the *Work at Height Regulations 2005*.

**“The easiest way to spot if the scaffolders are complying with the Guideline is to see if they are **wearing** fall arrest equipment”**

The HSE has expressed concern about the general lack of compliance with SG4:00 within the industry. Accordingly the revised publication has been produced as a management document to enable direction and guidance to be given where required. SG4:05 is supported by a pocket style user guide and a training pack. For details of release dates of these supporting publications please contact the NASC on 020 7397 8120 or visit the NASC website [www.nasc.org.uk](http://www.nasc.org.uk).

## What does SG4.05 look like?

The easiest way to spot if the scaffolders are complying with the Guideline is to see if they are wearing fall arrest equipment (usually harnesses) which are clipped on in the correct manner. These details should be identified in the Method Statement and Risk Assessment (see Chapter 10). Let's be clear here, this is a visual indication only – the whole issue of SG4:05 is more detailed and involved than this – but harnesses are an indicator. If you're scaffolder looks blank, rolls his eyes or tells you it's not applicable when you mention SG4:05, it could be time to find another scaffolder!

**9. How much do you pay?** This is where so many people go wrong. They usually get three quotes and go for the cheapest one – this is usually a big mistake!

It is important to remember how important this scaffold is to your project. You could be trusting your well being to it's correct installation and proper materials construction, and you may be relying on it to provide access for numerous other trades – who may charge you for it's inappropriate design or late installation (imagine your roofer telling you that he can't come back for a couple of weeks due to the scaffold not being ready in time!).

It is a lot easier and cheaper for a scaffold company to carry out a sub-standard installation, using untrained, uninsured staff with inferior work practices and equipment. Although a cheap job may be tempting now, it may cost a whole lot more in the long run if you need to defend a costly negligence claim or extra's bill from a follow-on subbie who couldn't get proper access.

Generally, the price of a scaffold structure reflects the quality of the materials used, the competency of the scaffolders used and the levels of after sales service. Remember, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is!

If there are huge variations in price, check the quotes for the following;

- Is the cheaper scaffolder doing less?
- Is the expensive scaffolder doing more?
- Are the quotes comparable? (See item 4).
- Is the scaffolder skimping on safety & quality exposing you to risk?

If there is no apparent reason for the huge variation in price, be a little suspicious. Use the details of this report to check whether the scaffolder is fulfilling all his legal and moral obligations.

**10. Who's Mr Big?** Find out who owns the firm and – if possible – speak to them to get a "feel" of what they're about. You can check Company Directors on the Companies House website <http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk/ddir/> to see if they've been disqualified and you can see basic company details there too <http://wck2.companieshouse.gov.uk/51c15e382ff1802f3f9fd7c81da79d1c/wcframe?name=accessCompanyInfo>. For the ludicrously small fee of £1 per report (as at May 07) you can get the latest details – including accounts – should you require them. If you order everything available for a company it only comes to £3! *You can do this by clicking the "Order information on this Company" button on the right hand side after you search for a company.*

**“Thankfully, the HSE run a database  
that allows you to search for  
companies/individuals that have been prosecuted..”**

It's important to understand that Companies House only gives the details of Companies and Directors in a financial sense. Thankfully, the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) run a similar database that allows you to search for companies that have been successfully prosecuted under Health & Safety Law <http://www.hse.gov.uk/Prosecutions/search/simple/default.asp>. You can search using a huge amount of criteria (name, case, geographic, type of breach etc) and it makes very interesting reading!

**“Whilst your looking at the boss, ask him (or them) their formal training qualifications”**

Whilst your looking at the boss, ask him (or them) their formal training qualifications – especially given that Directors have the ultimate accountability under H&S Law. At least one Director – the one that signs-off the H&S Policy – should preferably have a training qualification (and not just a “I turned up at a course certificate”). A good benchmark is the National Examination Board of Occupational Health & Safety (NEBOSH) Construction Certificate <http://www.nebosh.org.uk/awardsnew.asp?ID=6>. This involves 110 hours of classroom study, plus private reading and involves a practical exam and 2 written exams and is specifically aimed at the persons involved in the Construction sector.

## **11. Method Statement (MS) & Risk Assessment (RA)**

– Before work proceeds make sure you are in possession from the scaffolder of a suitable MS & RA. A MS is simple a piece by piece picture of how the scaffolder intends to install, maintain & dismantle the scaffold and the RA is, once again, a concise record of potential hazards (something with the potential to cause harm), the risk (the odds/chance of harm) and the control measure put in place to minimise the (potential) risk.

Every task should have a MS & RA to accompany it and it must be specific to that particular scaffold operation. Generic or “typical” Method Statement and Risk Assessment are not viewed in a positive way by the governing authorities.

Any scaffold firm with the correct safety culture will be able to provide these documents without difficulty.

In the weeks ahead we'll be sending you Free tips and advice via email that will help you get the most from your scaffolder, builder, painter, bricklayer or deal with your asbestos concern or insulation requirements, and avoid costly mistakes and misconceptions. We hope this is the beginning of a great, honest, long term relationship where we become your preferred source of honest information that will make a real difference to your business.

If you'd like to talk to us in more detail about anything you've read about here, please get in touch on 01634 298000, or click the link [www.alltask.co.uk](http://www.alltask.co.uk).

Daniel Fincham – Chief Executive, Alltask Ltd.

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