



Unit 23 Hewitts Estate, Elmbridge Road,  
Cranleigh, Surrey GU6 8LW

01483 338202  
www.nwconsultancy.co.uk

Safety Bulletin 30 November 2011

**nicola worley consultancy**

## When I'm cleaning windows!



Many of us take the view that it is quicker, easier and safer to use a professional window cleaner than try and do the job ourselves, particularly where ladders are involved. But when it comes to engaging a window cleaner do we apply the same rigorous checks we would apply to other contractors? We will certainly ask our window cleaner what he is going to charge but do we ask him how he is going to do the job? And then there's the paperwork. We usually want an invoice or a receipt but do we ask for a copy of the risk assessment?

Engaging someone to clean your windows for you does not remove your responsibility to manage the hazards associated with the task. You still have a responsibility to make sure that your window cleaner knows about the hazards at your premises to which he/ she might reasonably be exposed. These might be other

maintenance work going on at the same time. There might be weaknesses in structures on which he/ she might rely such as a fragile flat roof, weak eaves or weak window frames.

You also retain a responsibility for ensuring that other people who might reasonably be affected by the window cleaning are protected from harm such as your employees, visitors and members of the public passing by.

### What should you do when engaging a window cleaner?

#### 1. Is your window cleaner competent to carry out the job?

Have they been trained by a recognised training body such as the British Window Cleaning Academy or the Federation for Window Cleaners? You can use the ClearChoice scheme to help you find a trained and professional window cleaner. Go on line at [www.bwca.co.uk/clearchoice.html](http://www.bwca.co.uk/clearchoice.html) or find a window cleaner from the Federation for Window Cleaners website at [www.f-w-c.co.uk](http://www.f-w-c.co.uk)

#### 2. Does your window cleaner have public liability insurance?

Ask for a copy of their current insurance certificate.

#### 3. How is your window cleaner going to clean your windows?

The likelihood is that unless you they are using a ladder less system they will need to work at height and should have carried out a work at height risk assessment for the job. Ask to see their risk assessment and method statement to get a sense of whether what they propose is essentially going to be safe for your premises. For example, a ladder may be a good choice but:

- How will they anchor the ladder?
- How will they warn people that window cleaning is in progress?



Unit 23 Hewitts Estate, Elmbridge Road,  
Cranleigh, Surrey GU6 8LW

01483 338202  
www.nwconsultancy.co.uk

Safety Bulletin 30 November 2011

## nicola worley consultancy

- Are they going to be working alone?

### 4. Tell your window cleaner about your safety expectation and ask them to cooperate with these?

Show them your health and safety statement of intent if you have one and your safety rules for contractors and ask them to formally acknowledge that they understand your expectations and agree to cooperate with you in maintaining a safe and healthy environment at your premises.


You might choose to ask your window cleaner about his/ her health and safety policy but if they are a one man band or very small business they might not have a documented policy. They should however be able to provide you with a documented risk assessment for the job.


### 5. Should I tell my window cleaner how to do his job?

No. Don't get involved with the fine detail of how they plan to do the job but if something doesn't sound quite right to you should ask them how they intend to deal with it. For example, if you have no anchor points around the premises to which a ladder can be secured how will they prevent the ladder from slipping?

### What could possibly go wrong?

This might seem all a bit unnecessary and another example of health and safety madness but when things go wrong being able to prove you followed a robust and documented process for engaging your window cleaner, or any other contractor for that matter, will strengthen your defence in the event of an accident or incident. And things can and do go wrong as these examples from the Health and Safety Executive bear witness to:

 A window cleaner sustained broken ribs, fingers and a broken arm when he fell 2.3 m from his ladder while cleaning the windows of a show home on a new housing estate. The ladder was not secured or footed, the ground was dry but sloped gently away from the building. The construction company had not produced a method statement and the injured man had received no health and safety induction when he arrived on the site.

 In May 2010 Lincoln College were fined £1500 after a window cleaner fell 4 metres suffering broken ribs and a serious back injury.

 In March 2010 a Wakefield window cleaner died following a fall while cleaning windows at a domestic premises.

If you want to find out more about safety in window cleaning there is a Health and Safety Executive information sheet 'Safety in window cleaning using portable ladders' (HSE Information Sheet MISC613) which can be downloaded from the HSE website at [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/misc613.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/misc613.pdf) or you can research safe work at height from the HSE website at [www.hse.gov.uk/falls/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/falls/index.htm)