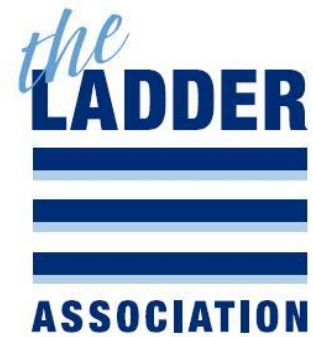




Geoffrey Podger



“LADDERS ARE NOT BANNED IN THE WORKPLACE”



The Ladder Association Q & A Interview with
Geoffrey Podger - Chief Executive of the Health and Safety Executive

Geoffrey Podger took up office as the Chief Executive of the Health and Safety Executive on 28 November 2005. Mr Podger was previously Executive Director of the European Food Standards Agency. Prior to that, Mr Podger was Chief Executive of the UK Food Standards Agency, which was established in April 2000 to bring about increased transparency and consumer involvement in food and safety related matters. Geoffrey Podger has been a UK civil servant since graduating from Oxford University in 1974. He has been mainly concerned with public health matters and has worked extensively for the Department of Health in London. He was awarded the CB in 2003.

Ladder Association: It is now almost two years since the Work at Height Regulations were first introduced. What is the HSE's view on the impact of the regulations to date?

Geoffrey Podger: The evidence we have gathered so far is encouraging and suggests the regulations have begun to make an impact:

- The number of fatal and major injuries from falls are at an all time low.
- Awareness of the regulations is quite high in the construction industry and generally amongst large firms – although we need to do more to reach small businesses and the services in particular.
- The sale and hire of access equipment has exceeded manufacturers' and suppliers' expectations.
- The regulations have been an excellent platform for HSE to promote the falls from height programme message.

We will continue to gather information and intelligence and publish it on the falls website <http://www.hse.gov.uk/falls/index.htm>

Ladder Association: Working at height is something that affects every industry. Has the reaction and response varied from sector to sector?

Geoffrey Podger: I agree that working at height affects every part of industry, but we still have a way to go in getting that message across and the need for action firmly embedded:

- Progress has been better among larger companies, particularly in the construction industry where 'traditional' working at height takes place.
- We have been less successful with the likes of retail workers stocking shelves or getting items from shelves in stockrooms.
- Our major target from last year's 'Height Aware' campaign remains building and plant maintenance workers.

HSE will continue to help and support sectors wanting to develop their own working at height guidance.

Ladder Association: Despite the HSE's campaign to inform industry that ladders are not banned, is it surprised by the misconceptions still surrounding the use of leaning ladders and step ladders (eg: "Firemen are ordered not to climb stepladders" – Daily Mail; "Stay off the ladder" – The Times; "Height of madness" – Daily Express).

Geoffrey Podger: Let me be clear, ladders are not banned, and HSE has been saying this since 2005:

- Despite that, HSE's Infoline still gets regular calls asking whether ladders are banned, so the rumour clearly won't go away;
- And we must remember that ladders are involved in more than 30 per cent of all fatal and major falls injuries in the workplace;
- There will be circumstances when a risk assessment concludes that a ladder is not the right sort of access equipment for a particular job. But this is not the same as saying ladders are banned.

HSE will continue to make this point publicly but we also welcome the industry's initiative in establishing the Ladder Association with its emphasis on safe and responsible ladder use. The new Association has the opportunity to redefine the terms of the debate about safe ladder use, which we support.

Ladder Association: How valuable is the work of the Ladder Association in promoting best practice through its nationally accredited training scheme and User Guide?

Geoffrey Podger: HSE's Falls Programme has worked closely with the British Ladder Manufacturers' Association (the Ladder Association's precursor) on each of its main campaigns and has valued that support. Ladders Week 2005 and the Height Aware Campaign 2006 were successful because of this active partnership and we look forward to continuing that partnership through Ladders Week 2007.

We welcome the Association's training scheme and User Guide as practical contributions to the Work at Height Regulations. They consolidate our common agenda of ensuring the right equipment is used in the right way to make workers safe when working at height. The new Association is strongly placed to develop further the safe use of ladders approach.

Ladder Association: What are the likely changes to WAHR going forward and what impact, if any, will they have on the use and application of ladders?

Geoffrey Podger: We have no plans to change the Work at Height Regulations. They are only two years old. They need time to bed in and for duty holders to get experience of working with them. Changing regulations creates additional cost and HSE is not in the business of regulatory change for change sake.

Ladder Association: In a single sentence, what would the HSE say to anyone still unsure as to whether ladders can continue to be used in the workplace?

Geoffrey Podger: Ladders are not banned in the workplace, so if it's right to use a ladder, use the right ladder and use it safely.

