

Fitting of Window Restrictors within Warwickshire County Council Premises

Background

Serious injuries have occurred when people have fallen from or through windows. Recent data from the Health & Safety Executive show that falls from height were the most common cause of fatalities, accounting for nearly three in ten (29%) fatal injuries to workers (RIDDOR):

(<http://www.hse.gov.uk/healthservices/falls-windows.htm>).

Under health and safety legislation, window restrictors are required where people who are vulnerable to the risk of falling, have access to windows, and the windows are at such a height where anybody falling out of them is at risk of sustaining a serious injury.

In practical terms, that places a duty on those responsible for the safety of persons using a particular building to assess the risk to determine the potential for any such users to fall out of any window within that building.

Managers Responsibilities

If as a Manager, you are responsible for the safety of persons using a particular building then you should read the following guidance and use the assessment form attached to help assess your requirement for window restrictors within your building.

Managers are in a position to understand the nature of activities taking place within the building and those who may be vulnerable.

Guidance on the assessment of risk

For the purposes of assessing the risk, falls can be divided into three broad categories;

Accidental – where people unintentionally fall through or from windows. This can happen where people are able to sit on and fall from sills, or where windows are positioned such that people could easily fall through them.

Of particular risk in this area are small children who may be able to climb on furniture which then allows them to access the window sill. The assessment of risk must take into account the design and layout of rooms and furniture in place. Behaviour as well as any specialist needs of children should also be considered, as well as general supervision levels. It is important to consider that children are less able to appreciate risk than an adult.

Another factor to consider in this area is window cleaning. If a particular window requires a person to access the window sill in order to clean the window, then it may be appropriate to fit a window restrictor.

Falls arising out of a confused mental state – the mental state of an individual can increase the risk of them falling out of a window. In particular, senility, dementia, reduced mental capacity, mental disorder and the effect of drink and drugs (both prescribed and illegal) can all cause anxiety and confusion.

In these cases, people have often tried to escape or used a window, believing it to be an exit.

Deliberate self-harm or suicide – a recognised risk for people with certain health conditions, particularly those with a history of self-harm or mental disorder.

However, also consider whether there is a need if a vulnerable child or adult has continued close supervision at all times in the room where the window has been identified as a risk.

In situations where the assessment highlights the potential for any of the three categories to apply then the fitting of window restrictors should be strongly considered.

Anyone who is responsible for undertaking such an assessment and is unsure as to its suitability should contact their WCC Corporate HSW Service (for general H&S advice).

WCC Maintenance & Minor Works Service can be contacted to arrange for the necessary works to be carried out through a competent contractor.

In general terms, any such restrictors should limit the opening of the window to 100mm or less, with restrictors requiring a special key or tool to be used to disengage them.

Where window restrictors are already fitted or are subsequently fitted following this assessment, managers have a responsibility to ensure that restrictors are used in accordance with their installation and not interfered with. In particular, there should be a process in place to ensure that restrictors are maintained to ensure there are no defects or failures in the mechanism. Any properties with integral side-stay mechanism window restrictors fitted with plastic spacers should be examined as soon as possible following a national alert on certain types which, if allowed to deteriorate and crack, may result in separation of the retaining rivet and failure of the restrictor. (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/safetybulletins/windowrestrictors.htm>).

Further advice can be obtained from your allocated WCC building surveyor.

Note: The assessment for window restrictors in buildings should be reviewed on an annual basis or following an incident or significant change in building usage/activities that increases the risk of falls to vulnerable people.

Window Restrictor Assessment (based on guidance attached)

BUILDING: _____

Potential cause of fall from window	Applicable to your building/area?	If Yes, who is at risk?	Comments/ description / location of window	Further action required?
Accidental	Yes / No			
Confused Mental State	Yes / No			
Deliberate Self Harm	Yes / No			

Completed by:	Name:	Position:	Date:
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Review date:	Note: Assessment to be reviewed on an annual basis or following an incident or significant change in building usage/activities that increases the risk of falls to vulnerable people
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