FMBusinessDaily

Competence at Height: Why Facilities Managers Must Take Suspended Access Training Seriously

2 months ago

As the sector looks ahead to No Falls Week (18–22 May 2026), the spotlight once again falls on one of the most persistent risks in the built environment: working at height. For facilities managers responsible for buildings with façade access systems – from cradles and building maintenance units (BMUs) to other suspended access equipment – ensuring competence is not simply a matter of best practice. It is a fundamental safety and compliance responsibility.

Working at height remains one of the most hazardous activities in construction, maintenance and building management. Ensuring that everyone involved – from operatives to building duty holders – understands how suspended access systems work, how they should be maintained and how risks should be managed is critical to preventing incidents.

Increasingly, the industry recognises that competence must start long before anyone steps onto a cradle or platform. This is where digital learning is transforming the way safety knowledge is delivered.

A new approach to suspended access training

The Specialist Access Engineering & Maintenance Association (SAEMA) – the UK's trade body for the permanent and temporary façade access industry – has developed a ground-breaking digital training platform designed specifically for those working in, or responsible for, suspended access systems.

Available online at training.saema.org the platform combines highly engaging animated visual content with integrated testing and invigilation technology. The result is an immersive learning experience

designed to ensure that knowledge is both accessible and credible.

Unlike traditional classroom-based training, the system allows learners to develop a clear understanding of equipment, procedures and hazards before ever arriving on site. Visualised modules enable users to see and recognise systems in a way that conventional training often cannot replicate, while built-in testing ensures learning outcomes are measurable and robust.

For facilities managers, this is particularly valuable. Many FM professionals carry legal responsibilities for ensuring that façade access equipment is safe, compliant and properly maintained. Yet historically, structured training aimed specifically at duty holders has been limited.

Three training pathways covering the entire sector

SAEMA's digital learning platform has been designed to address this gap through three complementary training programmes:

Permanent Equipment (Permanent Part 1) This course provides essential theory training for operatives working with permanently installed façade access systems such as building maintenance units. It covers fundamental

knowledge of suspended access equipment and the hazards associated with working at height.

Temporary Equipment (Temporary Part 1) Designed for construction and maintenance teams using temporary suspended access systems, this programme ensures users understand equipment types, risks and the regulatory framework before practical training takes place.

Duty Holder Training Specifically aimed at building owners, facilities managers and consultants, this programme focuses on oversight and compliance responsibilities. It helps participants understand their legal duties, inspection regimes, documentation requirements and how to manage suspended access systems safely.

Together, these courses create a comprehensive competence framework covering everyone involved in façade access – from those operating equipment to those responsible for managing it.

Learning that fits the realities of facilities management

One of the biggest barriers to training in the FM sector has traditionally been time. Facilities teams often juggle multiple responsibilities across complex estates, making it difficult to release staff for classroom-based courses.

SAEMA's digital platform addresses this challenge by enabling training to be completed remotely, at a time that suits the learner. Modules can be viewed on a computer, tablet or smartphone, allowing users to study at their own pace and revisit material whenever necessary.

Each module concludes with an assessment to verify understanding. Once completed successfully, participants receive a certificate of competence and a digital training card that can be verified on site.

For organisations responsible for managing high-rise buildings or complex façade systems, this provides clear evidence that personnel have achieved recognised industry training.

Supporting safer buildings and stronger compliance

For facilities managers, the implications are significant. Suspended access systems require careful management, regular inspection and proper operational procedures. Without the right knowledge, risks can easily be misunderstood or overlooked.

By ensuring that both operatives and duty holders understand how these systems work – and what their responsibilities are – training plays a crucial role in preventing incidents and maintaining compliance.

SAEMA's digital platform aims to make that knowledge more accessible than ever before. By combining modern learning technology with rigorous assessment, it helps ensure that competence is built before work begins on site.

A timely reminder for No Falls Week

As the industry prepares for No Falls Week 2026, the message for facilities managers is clear: preventing accidents at height starts with knowledge and competence.

Whether overseeing building maintenance units, façade access systems or suspended platforms, those responsible for buildings must ensure that everyone involved understands the equipment, the risks and the regulatory framework governing its use.

Digital training platforms such as SAEMA's are helping to raise the bar across the sector – ensuring that safety, competence and compliance are embedded long before anyone leaves the ground.

For facilities managers looking to strengthen safety culture across their estates, that knowledge could make all the difference.

More information on SAEMA training can be found at training.saema.org.