

Why Collective Fall Protection Must Come First in Preventing Falls from Height

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As the industry looks ahead to No Falls Week 2026 (18–22 May), attention is once again focused on one of construction's most persistent risks: falls from height. Led by the No Falls Foundation and supported by organisations across the sector, the campaign encourages employers and workers to take practical steps to prevent falls and promote safer working practices.

As an official supporter, FASET is using this opportunity to highlight a key principle in fall prevention: whenever possible, collective fall protection should come first. Systems such as safety netting, edge protection, stair towers and platform decking help control risk at source – protecting everyone working at height and reducing reliance on individual behaviour alone.

Working at height remains one of the most significant safety challenges in the construction industry. Despite advances in equipment, training and regulation, the risk of falling continues to cause life-changing injuries and fatalities every year.

Latest figures from the Health and Safety Executive show that falls from height remain the leading cause of workplace fatalities in Great Britain, responsible for around 28% of all worker deaths, with an average of around 38 fatalities each year.

For the industry, these numbers reinforce an important principle: the most effective way to prevent falls is to control the risk at source. That means prioritising collective fall protection wherever possible.

Designing out the risk

Collective fall protection systems are designed to protect everyone working at height, rather than relying

on individual behaviour or personal protective equipment.

Systems such as safety netting, edge protection, stair towers and platform decking create safer working environments by physically preventing falls or minimising their consequences.

For example:

- Safety netting provides a passive fall arrest system that can safely catch a worker should a fall occur.
- Edge protection systems prevent workers from reaching unprotected edges.
- Stair towers offer safe, structured access between levels.
- Platform decking creates stable working platforms that allow operatives to carry out tasks safely while reducing the need for temporary ladders or unsupported working positions.

Unlike personal fall protection systems such as harnesses, collective systems protect everyone on the worksite simultaneously, without requiring individual workers to take additional actions.

This aligns with the hierarchy of control within the Work at Height Regulations: risks should first be eliminated or prevented, rather than relying solely on mitigation.

Passive protection saves lives

One of the key advantages of collective fall protection is that it is passive.

Once installed correctly, systems such as safety nets or edge protection remain in place and provide continuous protection for the workforce. This significantly reduces the potential for human error, which can occur with personal systems that rely on correct fitting, anchoring or user behaviour.

Safety netting, for example, is specifically designed to act as a collective fall arrest system, capable of safely catching an individual who falls from a working surface above.

By reducing fall distances and absorbing the energy of a fall, these systems dramatically reduce the likelihood of serious injury.

The importance of trained installers

Of course, the effectiveness of any collective protection system depends on how it is installed and maintained.

Safety netting, edge protection and other temporary safety systems are life-critical installations that must be designed, rigged and inspected correctly. Competence is therefore essential.

This is where FASET plays a vital role.

FASET is the established trade association and training body for the safety netting and temporary safety systems industry, supporting the sector with specialist training, technical guidance and audited membership schemes.

Each year, FASET training programmes support over a thousand candidates, helping to ensure that installers working with fall protection systems have the knowledge and competence required to do the job safely.

Setting standards across the industry

Beyond training, FASET members work collaboratively to develop industry guidance and good practice documents covering the installation, inspection and safe use of fall protection systems.

This guidance supports contractors, clients and safety professionals by providing clear technical standards for systems such as:

- Safety netting
- Edge protection
- Stair tower access
- Access platform decking

By promoting consistent standards across the industry, FASET helps ensure that collective fall protection systems are installed and used correctly on construction projects across the UK.

Putting safety first

Ultimately, preventing falls from height requires a proactive approach to risk management.

When construction projects are designed with collective fall protection in mind — and when systems are installed by trained, competent professionals — the risks associated with working at height can be significantly reduced.

The message for the industry is clear:
collective protection must come first.

By prioritising systems that protect everyone on site, and by maintaining the highest standards of training and installation, the construction industry can continue to reduce the number of lives lost to preventable falls.