

CASE STUDY IAIN WILLIAMS CMIOSH

Planning and Management of Complex Work-at-Height Operations

Sector	Commercial cleaning, specialist access and facilities management
Experience	More than 24 years in senior operational and director-level roles
Scope	Complex façade access and work-at-height contracts across the UK

Extensive senior-level experience was applied to the planning and delivery of complex work-at-height operations involving specialist access systems, public interfaces and demanding city-centre logistics.

Operational context

Before establishing Action Safety, Iain Williams spent more than 24 years managing commercial window-cleaning, façade-access and specialist work-at-height contracts throughout the UK. The work was frequently undertaken on occupied buildings and in high-footfall public locations where the access method, timing and protection arrangements had to be integrated with the client's normal operations.

The challenge

Many contracts involved more than the work-at-height hazard alone. Projects could require rope access, suspended-access equipment, mobile elevating work platforms or other access arrangements, together with road closures, tram isolations, exclusion zones, pedestrian management and liaison with property managers, contractors and local authorities. The core challenge was to select a suitable access method and coordinate all of the connected risks without transferring unacceptable risk to workers, occupants or the public.

Approach taken

Work began with a detailed review of the building, task, access constraints, surrounding environment and client requirements. The work-at-height hierarchy was applied to determine whether the activity could be avoided and, where it could not, which access method provided the most appropriate collective or personal protection for the circumstances.

The planning process addressed equipment suitability and inspection, workforce competence, permits and authorisations, weather limitations, dropped-object prevention, exclusion zones, emergency and rescue arrangements and coordination with other building activities. Where work affected public roads, tram infrastructure or busy entrances, the programme incorporated the necessary approvals, isolation periods, traffic arrangements and stakeholder communication.

Project-specific RAMS translated the plan into a clear working method. Supervisors and operatives were briefed before work commenced, and the arrangements were reviewed when site conditions, access requirements or the client's operations changed.

Key outputs

Site-specific access strategy and work-at-height planning

Project RAMS, permits and workforce briefing arrangements

Equipment, competence and inspection requirements

Public-protection, traffic and exclusion-zone controls

Emergency and specialist rescue arrangements

Coordination with clients, contractors and relevant authorities

Outcome and value

This approach enabled complex façade and specialist-access activities to be delivered through structured planning rather than reliance on individual judgement at the point of work. The method created a clear link between access selection, competence, equipment, public protection and emergency arrangements. It also helped clients understand the operational requirements of the work and supported controlled delivery with minimum practicable disruption to occupied premises and surrounding public areas.