

1/F1 VISITS TO SITES AND UNOCCUPIED BUILDINGS

Health and Safety

Health and Safety legislation lays clear obligations on clients, designers, and principal contractors. The following code is complementary advice to all architects engaged in visits to buildings and sites.

Visits to building sites, unoccupied buildings and construction operations can be potentially dangerous. Consider the likely hazards. Follow the safety code.

1 Occupied building sites

The Contractor or occupier has a responsibility for the safety of persons lawfully on site. Do not enter sites or buildings without permission, and immediately report to the person in charge. Comply with all requests from the contractor, his representative or other supervisory staff. See the contractor when you arrive, and when you leave the site.

Wear suitable clothing, in particular protective headgear (a hard hat) and stout shoes or boots. Do not wear thin-soled or slippery shoes. Avoid loose clothes which might catch on an obstruction.

Check that ladders are securely fixed and that planks are secure. Beware of overhead projections, scaffolding and plant, and proceed with caution. Particular care is necessary in windy, cold, wet or muddy conditions. Keep clear of excavations and beware of openings in floors etc. Do not lean on guard rails, scaffoldings etc. Do not interfere with any temporary barriers, guard rails or lights. Beware of ladders on which the rungs may have rusted or rotted, and never climb a ladder which is not securely fixed at the top.

Do not touch any plant or equipment. Keep clear of machinery and stacked materials. Watch out for temporary cables, pumps, hoses and electric fittings.

Do not walk and look around at the same time. Keep one hand free at all times when moving. Make sure that you are in a safe and balanced position whenever making notes or taking photographs.

Report to the contractor anything that comes to your notice on the site as being unsafe.

2 Unoccupied buildings and sites

As a general rule do not visit an empty building or unoccupied site on your own. Make sure someone knows where you are, and at what time you expect to return.

Do not take chances. Do not visit an empty building if you think it unsafe. Do not visit an unoccupied site if you think it dangerous. Anticipate hazards.

Common dangers include:

- possibility of partial or total structural collapse
- rotten or insecure floors and stairs
- hidden pits, ducts, openings etc., fragile construction, e.g. asbestos or plastic sheets on roofs
- space which has not been used or ventilated for some time
- live services
- contamination by chemicals or asbestos
- intruders who may still be around
- contamination by vermin or birds, or poisonous substances put down to control them.

Plan the visit and make sure that you take with you appropriate equipment and protective clothing. Apart from stout shoes and a hard hat, remember that unoccupied buildings can be dirty, damp, cold and dark; so go prepared.

Look for defects in the floors ahead, e.g. wet areas, holes, materials that might be covering up holes.

Familiarise yourself beforehand with the plan of the building, particularly the exit routes. Make sure that security devices on exits will allow you to reach safety quickly.

Walk over the structural members (e.g. joists, beams, etc.) whenever possible - do not rely on floorboards alone.

Do not walk and look around at the same time. Keep one hand free at all times when moving. Do not walk and try to take notes at the same time. Make sure that you are in a safe and balanced position when taking photographs or stretching out to take measurements.

Check on protection when approaching stairwells, lift shafts, roof perimeters, etc.

Do not assume that services (e.g. cables, sockets, pipes, etc.) are safe or have been isolated.

If you suspect the presence of gas, inflammable liquids, dangerous chemicals or free asbestos fibre leave the building immediately.

If you sustain cuts, penetration by nails or other serious injury, seek immediate medical advice.

Always heed these three golden rules:

- do not rush
 - if uncertain do not proceed - seek advice or assistance
 - do not smoke or use naked flame.
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