

Construction Safety Focus

July 2016



Preventing falls from height in building & construction

This document provides employers and employees with information about WorkSafe's current safety focus in the construction industry and directs them to detailed guidance regarding the prevention of falls from height.

We're focusing on safe work at heights

WorkSafe Inspectors are currently visiting construction sites across Victoria to ensure that works at height are being performed safely.

Why the visits?

- Falls from height remain one of the leading causes of death and serious injury in Victoria's construction sector.
- Over the past ten years there have been at least 17 construction workers killed due to falls from height.
- Over the past five years more than 1,350 construction workers have required workers' compensation and time off work for injuries resulting from a fall - many of these injuries have been 'life-changing'.
- WorkSafe Inspectors are still routinely finding and taking enforcement action in cases of unsafe work at height.

Common construction fall hazards

Falls incidents have often been associated with:

- working on or near unprotected edges;
- using unsafe or incomplete scaffolds;
- using inappropriate ladders or unsafe ladder use;
- falling from roofs or through fragile roofs or skylights;
- falling from trucks or plant;
- falling through stair-voids; and
- falling into holes, pits or shafts.

Controlling the risk of falls

Whilst employers (including self-employed persons) are required to control the risk of falls from any height, construction work involving a risk of a fall from more than two metres is prescribed 'high-risk construction work' (HRCW) and further specific duties apply.

These specific duties include a requirement that work must not commence unless a Safe Work Method Statement (SWMS) has been developed. The SWMS must:

- identify work that is HRCW; and
- state the hazards and risks to health or safety of that work; and
- sufficiently describe measures to control those risks; and
- describe the manner in which the risk control measures are to be implemented.

The SWMS must be followed during the work. If it is not being followed the work must stop.

Notes: Affected workers and their health and safety representatives must be consulted when identifying risks and hazards and determining risk control measures. Additional duties exist in relation to SWMS – refer to "Further Information" section.

Risk control measures (falls over 2 metres)

A duty holder (eg an employer) must first try to eliminate the risk of falls over two metres. If that is not reasonably practicable, the next highest level of control (that is reasonably practicable) must be used in accordance with the table below. Appropriate emergency procedures must also be established.

Note: A combination of risk control measures will usually be required.

Hierarchy of Risk Control for Prevention of Falls

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| Level 1 | Eliminate the risk by doing all or some of the work on the ground or from a solid construction |
| Level 2 | Reduce remaining risk by using a passive fall prevention device, e.g.: scaffolds, perimeter screens, guardrails, elevating work platforms, safety mesh |
| Level 3 | Reduce remaining risk by using a work-positioning system, e.g. travel-restraint systems, industrial rope-access systems |
| Level 4 | Reduce remaining risk by using fall-arrest systems, such as catch platforms, fall arrest-harness systems |
| Level 5 | Reduce remaining risk by using a ladder or implement an administrative control. |

Note: Ladders are not suitable for long duration or high force tasks. Record keeping duties apply for administrative-only controls.

Employee legal duties

Employees must take reasonable care of their own health and safety and that of others who may be affected by their acts or omissions at work. This includes not interfering with or misusing things provided at a workplace in the interests of health, safety or welfare (eg guardrails or scaffolds).

Further Information

Visit www.worksafe.vic.gov.au to download the following publications:

Compliance Code, Prevention of Falls in General Construction, 2008

Code of Practice, Prevention of Falls in Housing Construction, 2004

Guidance Note, Fall Protection for Roof Work, 2010

Guidance Note, Preventing Falls from Earth Moving Equipment, 2012

Guidance Note, Prevention of Falls in Construction - Selection and Safe Use of Ladders, 2013

Safety Alert, Edge Protection Guard Railing Failure, 2010

Guidance Note, Fall Prevention for Scaffolders, 2005

Information About, Safe Work Method Statements, 2015.

Contact WorkSafe's Advisory Service on (03) 9641 1444 or free call 1800 136 089.

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