

Residential Construction - Working at Heights

INCIDENT

The tragic death of a 60 year old worker occurred this week, after falling from the second storey of a residential construction site in Denman Prospect. This is the second death of a worker on a residential construction site in Denman Prospect in less than a month.

Over recent weeks, WorkSafe ACT conducted a blitz on residential building sites in both north and south Canberra with a strong focus on key safety risks. Due to the poor level of compliance with safety laws, 70 notices were issued on 28 sites. Of the 70 notices issued, 19 were Prohibition Notices where there was an imminent safety risk to workers.



WorkSafe ACT will continue its strong focus on residential building sites over coming months and inspectors will not hesitate to issue more notices, including closing sites that do not meet basic safety requirements.

The ACT Work Safety Commissioner has issued this safety alert as a timely reminder to workers of the precautions to take to reduce the risk of falls from heights occurring on sites.

BACKGROUND

Falls are a major cause of death and serious injury at workplaces. Ladders, incomplete scaffolds, falling off a truck, a roof edge or falling through fragile roof sheeting are the major causes of death or serious injury. The risk of serious injury from a fall is largely dependent on the height but also the surface below. Half the deaths from falls from height are from 3 metres or less.

In Australia, over the five-year period between 2014 and 2018, 123 workers died as a result of a fall from height. 51 of these fatalities were in construction, which represents a third of all construction deaths in this period.

The risk of falling is high in construction but may also occur during many other work activities. Work on a roof or near a roof edge is high risk, along with any work involving ladders. Using a ladder as a work platform should be avoided where possible as it has the risk of a fall because of ladder stability and security as well as the worker's action of moving on or off the ladder. View WorkSafe's Safety Video on Ladder Safety [here](#). Falls from trucks or vehicles is also a high-risk area.

Although a risk management approach must be used to manage the risks of falls from heights, there are regulatory obligations that a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) must comply with in different workplaces.

WorkSafe ACT



SAFETY ALERT



Construction work carried out where there is a risk of a person falling more than 2 metres is deemed high risk construction work and therefore requires a safe work method statement. A safe work method statement is based on a site-specific risk assessment and includes the measures for eliminating workplace risks or minimising these risks as far as is reasonably practicable. A safe work method statement must be developed in consultation with workers who are carrying out the high-risk construction work (and their representatives) before the commencement of any 'high risk construction work'. Further information in relation to Safe Work Method Statements can be found [here](#).

ACTION REQUIRED

In all circumstances where working from heights is necessary, including below 2 metres, all reasonably practicable steps must be taken before work is commenced to identify hazards, assess the risks and determine the most appropriate controls which should be applied to eliminate risks. However, if it's not reasonably practicable to eliminate the risk, then it should be minimised using the hierarchy of controls. This can be achieved by doing one or more of the following:

- substitute the hazard causing the risk with something of lesser risk (e.g. using an elevated work platform so workers can avoid standing on a ladder to perform the task). Where regular access is required, consider fixed access systems such as stairways and platforms.
- implementing engineering controls - for example, fall-prevention device, a work-positioning system or a fall-arrest system with adequate anchorage points. The installation of physical barriers (e.g. guard rails) along open edges of the roof (if working on the roof).

Any remaining risk must then be minimised by using administrative controls. For example:

- implementing a safe system of work that considers:
 - the design
 - condition and layout of elevated work areas, including the distance of a potential fall and the load rating of the structure (e.g. ladders)
 - correct setup, stability and security of ladders
 - only light duty work is undertaken while on ladders, where three points of contact can be maintained and tools can be operated safely with on hand.
- implementing safe systems for a fall-prevention device, a work-positioning system or a fall-arrest system. A work-positioning system enables a person to work supported in a harness in tension in a way that prevents the person from falling (e.g. industrial rope access). A fall-arrest system stops a person who has fallen and reduces the impact of the fall (e.g. industrial safety nets or fall arrest harnesses used with lifelines or individual anchors).
- ensuring the provision of adequate training, instruction and supervision in how to use a fall-prevention device, a work-positioning system or a fall-arrest system and in the emergency and rescue procedure should someone fall.
- the adequacy of current knowledge and training to perform the task safely (young, new or inexperienced workers may be unfamiliar with the task).

SAFETY ALERT



If a risk remains, it must be minimised so far as reasonably practicable by using personal protective equipment (PPE). For example, non-slip footwear.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For practical information about working on the ground or from a solid construction, fall prevention devices, work positioning systems, fall arrest systems, ladders, administrative controls, emergency procedures, and the design of plant and structures, see the [Code of practice for managing the risk of falls at workplaces](#).

For specific guidance for housing construction, see the [Code of practice for managing the risk of falls in housing construction](#).

For further information on [working at heights](#) watch our safety video or visit our [website](#), alternatively contact WorkSafe ACT on 6207 3000 or email CMTEDDWorkSafeACT@act.gov.au.

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