



This document provides employers and employees with information about WorkSafe's focus on preventing falls in construction

## We're focusing on falls

WorkSafe inspectors are visiting construction sites across Victoria to ensure that fall risks are being controlled.

## Why the visits?

Falls remain one of the leading causes of death and serious injury in Victoria's construction sector:

- Over the past 10 years there have been 17 construction workers killed due to falls.
- Over the past 5 years more than 6,400 construction workers have needed workers' compensation for serious injuries from a fall; many of these injuries have been life-changing.

WorkSafe inspectors routinely identify breaches and take enforcement action where fall risks are not controlled.

## Common construction fall hazards

Fall incidents are often associated with:

- working on or near unprotected edges (eg while installing formwork)
- 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
- falling into holes, pits or shafts

## Duty to control risk

Where there is a risk of a fall **less than two metres** employers **must**:

- so far as is reasonably practicable eliminate risks to health and safety, for example any risk associated with a fall at the workplace.
- if elimination of the risk is not reasonably practicable, the risk **must** be reduced, so far as is reasonably practicable

Where there is a risk of a fall of **more than two metres** employers and self-employed persons **must**:

- comply with the specific prevention of falls requirements including following the "control of risk" hierarchy (see table) and establishing emergency procedures
- follow specific high risk construction work (HRCW) duties including the duty to prepare and follow a safe work method statement (SWMS).

### Control of risk for prevention of falls above 2 metres

- 1. Eliminate the risk**  
For example, do all or some of the work on the ground or from a solid construction
- 2. Reduce remaining risk by using a passive fall prevention device.**  
For example, scaffolds, perimeter screens, guardrails, elevating work platforms or safety mesh.
- 3. Reduce remaining risk by using a work-positioning system.**  
For example, travel-restraint systems or industrial rope-access systems
- 4. Reduce remaining risk by using fall-arrest systems.**  
For example, catch platforms or fall arrest-harness systems.
- 5. Reduce remaining risk by using a ladder or administrative controls.**  
Note: Ladders are not suitable for long duration or high force tasks. Record keeping duties apply for administrative-only controls

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

## High risk construction work duties

Where work involves a risk of a person falling more than two metres, the work is classified as HRCW. HRCW has additional specific risk control duties.

HRCW must not start until a SWMS has been developed. A SWMS must:

- identify work that is HRCW
- state the hazards and risks of that work
- sufficiently describe measures to control fall risks
- describe how the risk control measures are to be implemented
- be set out and expressed in a way that is readily accessible and comprehensible to the persons who uses it.

If a SWMS is not being followed the HRCW work must stop.

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

# Prevention of falls

## 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, for example, not interfering with or misusing items provided at a workplace including tools and safety equipment (eg unauthorised removal of guardrails or tampering with scaffolding).

## Further Information

Contact WorkSafe Advisory Service on 1800 136 089 or go to **[worksafe.vic.gov.au](https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au)**

- Compliance Code, Prevention of Falls in General Construction
- Code of Practice, Prevention of Falls in Housing Construction
- Guidance Note, Fall Protection for Roof Work
- Guidance Note, Preventing Falls from Earth Moving Equipment
- Guidance Note, Prevention of Falls in Construction - Selection and Safe Use of Ladders
- Safety Alert, Edge Protection Guard Railing Failure
- Guidance Note, Fall Prevention for Scaffolders

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