



## Significant Incident Summary No. 2

### Scaffolder falls and is injured while carrying out high risk construction work

#### Summary of incident

In 2019, a group of workers were constructing a 10-metre high loading bay scaffold. One of the workers stepped onto a single plank temporarily being used as a working platform to construct the scaffold, when the plank gave way underfoot. This caused the scaffolder to fall approximately five metres to the ground below, sustaining serious injuries.

A fall injury prevention system, such as a safety harness to arrest a fall, must be used where a person could fall three metres or more from an edge at a workplace. The scaffolder was wearing a harness with double hook lanyards, but was not hooked onto the scaffold at the time of the incident, compromising the fall arrest system. This should have provided a fail safe level of fall arrest, allowing the worker to move safely around the scaffolding, while being continually connected to a suitable anchorage point.

#### Contributory factors

- Safe work method statements (SWMS) are required for high risk construction work. A scaffold erection SWMS was provided to the group of scaffolders as part of the induction process. It is unknown whether the group had considered the hazards, or were aware of the measures in place to control risks as the SWMS was not signed.
- Pictures and diagrams can assist to ensure a SWMS is easily understood by workers; however, there were no specific drawings for the proposed loading bay scaffold.
- The minimum access width for a scaffold working platform is 450 mm (2 planks wide). The scaffolder did place two planks onto the transoms, but they were end-to-end rather than side by side, meaning he was only working on a single plank, of approximately 225 mm in width.
- The scaffolding available at the job site was not sufficient. The scaffolders had to search the site to re-purpose existing framework, which can lead to varying degrees of quality and fitness for purpose. This also meant any pre-assessment of tools or equipment prior to commencing the build could not take into account the scaffolding that would actually be used.

#### Actions required

A person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) must manage the risks of falls. If it is reasonably practicable, work must be done on the ground or on a solid construction. Where this is not reasonably practicable, fall hazards must be controlled through adequate risk control measures.

PCBUs must prevent falls between levels by providing:

- A safe system of work, which includes:
  - temporary work platforms
  - information, instruction and training
  - procedures, such as work sequences, ladder use and permit systems
- A safe way to access and exit any area that has a risk of falls.
- A fall prevention device (e.g. a secure fence, edge protection, working platforms and covers) where reasonably practicable. If a fall prevention device is not reasonably practicable, work positioning system must be provided.

Where there are multiple PCBUs at a workplace, it is vital that PCBUs consult, cooperate and coordinate with other duty holders, to ensure that risks are eliminated or minimised so far as is reasonably practicable.

A combination of controls can be used to minimise risks so far as is reasonably practicable.

## Recommendations

To manage the risks of scaffolds and scaffolding work, assessment of all aspects of the work, including construction, dismantling and maintenance of the scaffolding must be carried out. This includes the risks involved in working on temporary scaffolding structures during construction.

PCBUs must ensure that safe work practices and standards are not just in place but are being used on site. Worker must be notified of, and comply with, any reasonable policies or procedures relating to health and safety at the workplace, and take reasonable care for their own health and safety.

## Further information

Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety

- [Code of Practice: Construction Work](#)
- [Code of Practice: Managing the risk of falls at workplaces](#)
- [Code of Practice: Managing the risk of falls in housing industry](#)
- [Information Sheet: Managing the risk of falls at workplaces](#)
- [Information Sheet: Scaffolding issues](#)

Australian/New Zealand Standards

- AS/NZS 1576.1:2019 General Requirements - Scaffolding
- AS/NZS 1576.3:2015 Prefabricated and tube-and-coupler scaffolding

Safe Work Australia

- [Information sheet: Safe work method statement for high risk construction work](#)
- [Guide to scaffolds and scaffolding](#)