

A guide to

Falls prevention

Edition 2
June 2017



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The information presented in Your health and safety guide to workplace amenities and first aid is intended for general use only. It should not be viewed as a definitive guide to the law, and should be read in conjunction with the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004.

This guidance has been reviewed and updated for the sole purpose of amending year and regulation references relating to the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, in line with amendments which came into effect on 18 June 2017.

In this guide

Falls from even moderate heights can leave workers with permanent and debilitating injuries.

The risk of serious injury or death from a fall increases significantly if you are working at heights over two metres.

While falls can occur in all industries, they are most common in construction, manufacturing, community services, trade, communications, transport and storage.

This guide will help you understand the risks, and will explain what you need to do to make your workplace safe.

If this Subject Guide does not contain an up-to-date *More information* sheet, please go to www.worksafe.vic.gov.au to download the PDF or contact us on **1800 136 089** to request a printed copy.

There's plenty more information about health and safety...

www.worksafe.vic.gov.au
1800 136 089

About the issue

- What are falls?
- What injuries can falls cause?

Your legal duties

- The law
- Information for employers
- Information for employees
- Compliance and enforcement

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- Consult
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Glossary

About the issue

What are falls?

Employers have a duty to ensure their workplace is safe, and this means controlling the risk of falls from any height.

Analysis has shown that the risk of serious injury from a fall is much higher in falls from two metres or more.

The prevention of falls part of the OHS Regulations applies when there is a risk of a fall of more than 2 metres. Typical falls that cause death and injury include those resulting from:

- using unsafe or incomplete scaffolds
- inappropriate ladders/ladder use
- falling from or through roofs
- falling from trucks
- falling into holes, pits or shafts
- accessing shelving
- accessing mezzanine areas.

What injuries can falls cause?

Falls from height are a common cause of death in workplaces across Victoria.

Even from a relatively low height, a fall can cause very serious injuries, including fractures, spinal cord injury, concussions and brain damage.

Your legal duties

The law

Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (OHS Act)

The OHS Act came into effect on 1 July 2005. It sets out the key principles, duties and rights in relation to occupational health and safety. The duties imposed by the Act cover a wide variety of circumstances, recognising the need for a duty-holder to have flexibility in determining what needs to be done to comply.

The OHS Act is based upon the following key health and safety principles:

- All people – employees and the general public – should have the highest level of protection against risks to health and safety.
- Those who manage or control things that create health and safety risks in the workplace are responsible for eliminating or reducing the risks, so far as is reasonably practicable.
- Employers should be proactive in promoting health and safety in the workplace.
- Information and ideas about risks and how to control them should be shared between employers and employees.
- Employees are entitled – and should be encouraged – to be represented in relation to health and safety issues.

Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017 (OHS Regulations 2017).

Part 3.3- *prevention of falls* of the OHS Regulations is intended to prevent falls of more than two metres, and reduce the number of falls that result in serious injury.

To do this, the OHS Regulations impose specific legal responsibilities on employers for prevention and control.

Employers

As an employer, you have a general duty to make your workplace safe. This includes controlling the risk of falls. If there is a risk of a fall of more than 2 metres, specific duties apply.

You must identify any task where a person may fall more than two metres.

If it is reasonably practicable, you must eliminate the risk- (eg by doing the work on the ground or on a solid construction). If this is not reasonably practicable, you must control the risk using the following measures in order of priority, so far as is reasonably practicable:

- use a passive fall prevention device
- use a work positioning system to ensure employees work within a safe area
- install a fall arrest system to limit the risk of injuries in the event of a fall
- use a fixed or portable ladder, or implement an administrative control.

If you use a control measure other than working on the ground or on a solid construction, then you must establish emergency procedures covering the rescue of an employee in the event of a fall and the provision of first aid.

Any equipment or materials used to control the risk of a fall must be appropriately designed and constructed for the task and the conditions it will be used in. In addition, fixed or portable ladders must be fit for purpose, appropriate for the duration of the task, and set up properly.

If you are using only an administrative control, you must record what it is and the task for which it is being used.

You must review (and, where necessary, revise) your risk controls if things change or at the request of a health and safety representative. Employers also have a duty to consult employees and health and safety representatives when identifying hazards and deciding on control measures.

Exceptions

You do not have to comply with the specific duties in the prevention of falls part of the OHS Regulations 2017 if a task is being done on parts of a building or structure (including stairs, fixed ladders, ramps and balconies) provided:

- they comply with the Australian Standard for the design, construction and installation of fixed platforms, walkways, stairways and ladders (AS 1657); and
- they comply with the Building Regulations 2006 (Vic); and
- they are being used for their proper purpose.

Certain types of work, such as stunt work, sporting activities and performance are not covered by Part 3.3 of the OHS Regulations.

There are some slight differences in the legal requirements covering emergency service employees and law enforcement officers. If you are in either of these industries, contact the WorkSafe Advisory Service on **1800 136 089** or visit **www.worksafe.vic.gov.au** for advice on your organisation's legal duties in relation to falls prevention.

Employees

Your employer is required to protect you from the risk of falls in the workplace.

At the same time, you have a general duty to take reasonable care for your own health and safety, and that of others who may be affected by your work, and to cooperate with your employer's efforts to make the workplace safe.

This includes following workplace policies and procedures, using equipment properly, and attending health and safety training as well as helping to identify hazards and risks.

You and your HSRs have a right to be consulted by your employer in regard to identifying falls hazards and deciding on control measures.

Compliance and enforcement

WorkSafe applies a strategy of 'constructive compliance' – a combination of incentives and deterrents – to improve workplace health and safety.

This strategy recognises that real and sustainable improvement in workplace health and safety requires active involvement from employers and employees in identifying hazards and controlling risks.

WorkSafe inspectors have the primary role of targeting unsafe workplace activity, enforcing compliance with health and safety laws, and providing guidance and advice on how to comply with those laws.

Further information on workplace inspections and WorkSafe's enforcement policy is available through the WorkSafe Advisory Service (**1800 136 089**) or at **www.worksafe.vic.gov.au**

How to comply

WorkSafe has a range of guidance materials to advise on the required processes and actions that duty-holders must take in order to meet their legal obligations.

Compliance Codes, Health and Safety Solutions and Guidance Notes each provide detailed and specific advice for duty-holders seeking to comply with the OHS Regulations 2007. See also the enclosed *More information* sheet for a listing of guidance materials related to falls prevention.

Consult

Employees' expertise can make a significant contribution to improving workplace health and safety.

Regular, proactive consultation can help identify issues in the workplace and build a strong commitment to health and safety by including all views in the decision-making process.

Under the OHS Act, employers must consult with employees when identifying and assessing falls hazards or risks, and making decisions about risk control.

'Employees' includes independent contractors (and any employees of the independent contractor(s)) who perform work which the employer has, or should have, control over.

If employees are represented by health and safety representatives, the consultation must involve those representatives – see *Your health and safety guide to consultation* for further information.

Find

To prevent serious injuries occurring at your workplace, you need to identify all tasks that involve the possibility of someone falling more than two metres.

Tasks that may involve the risk of a fall include:

- work done on any machinery, equipment or structure being constructed, inspected, tested, maintained, repaired or cleaned
- tasks on a fragile, slippery or potentially unstable surface
- using equipment to gain access to an elevated level or to work at an elevated level
- work on a sloping surface where it is difficult to maintain balance
- work near an unprotected edge or in close proximity to a hole, shaft or pit into which a person could fall.

Some typical examples of work practices that involve the risk of a fall include:

- maintenance work on a roof, such as gutter clearing, painting or roof restoration, with no guarding or fall protection
- working from the bucket of a front-end loader or tractor, or from a pallet lifted by a forklift
- no guarding, railing or signage around holes, pits or shafts
- fitting truck tarps by climbing across a load without using fall prevention
- working on top of livestock carriers without any fall prevention measures like guard rails
- setting up a ladder on a slippery or uneven surface without securing it to prevent it slipping
- using a cherry picker without a secure lanyard and safety harness connecting the worker to the basket.

How to comply

Fix

Work through this list in the following order to control the risk of falls at your workplace. In many instances, a combination of approaches will result in the best solution.

1. Do the work on the ground or on a solid construction

Example: Use tilt-up concrete construction instead of constructing the concrete walls at a height.

2. Use a passive fall prevention device

Example: Elevating work platform, scaffolding or guard railing.

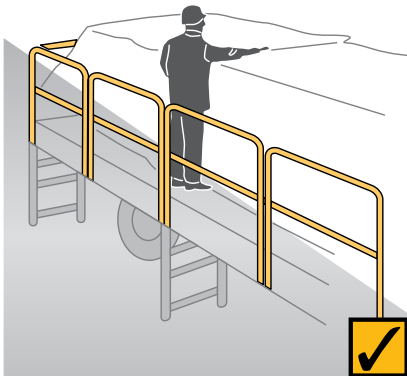


Fig 1: Guard railing

3. Use a work positioning system

Example: Industrial rope access system or travel restraint system.

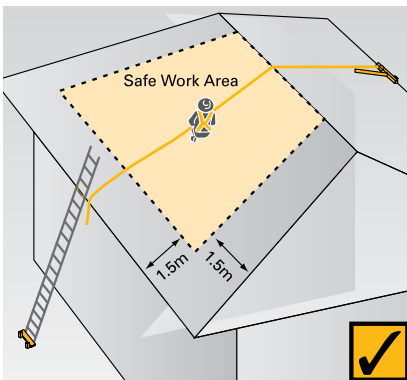
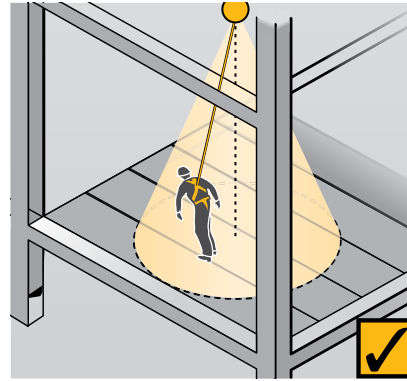


Fig 2: Travel restraint system

4. Install a fall arrest system

Example: Industrial safety net, catch platform or safety harness system.



5. Use a fixed or portable ladder, or implement administrative controls

Example: Establish a safe work procedure to prevent employees from accessing a brittle and fragile roof, and put up a sign.



Review

It's important to review your risk controls regularly to ensure they are implemented correctly and to monitor their effectiveness.

You need to review (and, if necessary, revise) your risk controls whenever any changes are made to the workplace that could increase risks, such as changes to the way work is done.

A review is also necessary if a health and safety representative requests one.

Employees and HSRs must be consulted when reviewing risk controls.

Glossary

Administrative control	Using methods such as policies, procedures, safety signs, training or supervision, or a combination of these methods, to control risk.
Employee	A person employed under a contract of employment or contract of training.
Employer	A person who employs one or more people under contracts of employment or contracts of training.
Hazard	A potential source of harm or injury. The potential to cause injury, illness or disease.
Health and safety representative (HSR)	A member of a designated work group elected to represent employees on matters relating to occupational health and safety.
Passive fall prevention device	Material or equipment, or a combination of material and equipment, that is designed for the purpose of preventing a fall and that, after initial installation, does not require any ongoing adjustment, alteration or operation by any person to ensure the integrity of the device to perform its function.
Reasonably practicable	See section 20(2) of the OHS Act and the WorkSafe Position on <i>How WorkSafe applies the law in relation to reasonably practicable.</i>

In this series

Hazards

- Your health and safety guide to asbestos
- Your health and safety guide to confined spaces
- Your health and safety guide to dangerous goods
- Your health and safety guide to falls prevention
- Your health and safety guide to hazardous substances
- Your health and safety guide to lead
- Your health and safety guide to manual handling
- Your health and safety guide to noise
- Your health and safety guide to plant

Industries

- Your health and safety guide to construction
- Your health and safety guide to forestry
- Your health and safety guide to foundries
- Your health and safety guide to major hazard facilities
- Your health and safety guide to mines

Subjects

- Your health and safety guide to communicating across languages
- Your health and safety guide to consultation
- Your health and safety guide to controlling OHS hazards and risks
- Your health and safety guide to licensing and registrations
- Your health and safety guide to workplace amenities and first aid

Visit www.worksafe.vic.gov.au for online guidance on all of these topics and more.

WorkSafe Victoria

WorkSafe Agents

Agent contact details are all available at worksafe.vic.gov.au/agents

Advisory Service

Phone.....(03) 9641 1444

Toll-free.....1800 136 089

Email.....info@worksafe.vic.gov.au

Website.....worksafe.vic.gov.au

For information about WorkSafe in your own language, call our Talking your Language service

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