



Safework officers to inspect construction sites to eliminate unsafe work practices

Overview

Everyone involved in the construction industry knows that the number one priority on construction sites is the safety of the workforce at all times, with heavy penalties and prosecutions for those that fail to adhere to these important safety practices and procedures.

Head contractors can now expect to see more inspections by SafeWork NSW to audit safety compliance on site, with the NSW Government increasing their resources in this area in an effort to reduce serious injuries and fatalities on building sites.

Last month, SafeWork NSW Acting Executive Director, Compliance and Dispute Resolution, Meagan McCool said *“Falling from heights is the number one killer on NSW construction sites, which is why the NSW Government is taking action to ensure sites are as safe as possible.”*

This time around, there will be a specific focus by SafeWork NSW to audit practices and procedures for work on ladders, roofs and scaffolding on building sites. SafeWork officers will inspect construction sites to ensure safe working conditions and that “lives are not put at a risk when working at heights”.

The officers can issue on-the-spot fines of up to \$720 for individuals and \$3,600 for businesses who fail to manage working at heights risks. SafeWork officers will also conduct inspections on whether businesses have implemented COVID-19 safety measures. Relevant penalties will be applied.

Head Contractor obligations

Working at heights is one of the highest risk activities in the industry. According to Safe Work Australia, 48% of fatalities in the construction industry were from falls from height. Due to the fatal consequence of fall risk, Meagan McCool has stated that the NSW government is now committed to driving the number of falls from heights incidents right down.

Work Health and Safety Regulation 2017 (NSW) has set out specific laws in Part 4.4 about working at height safety. The employer must manage any risk of a fall on site. If it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate the risk of a fall, the employer must minimise the risk by undertaking adequate protections. The maximum penalty for failure to comply will be \$7,700 (70 penalty units) for an individual or \$34,950 (345 penalty units) for a body corporate.

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Risk Management

There are a few steps that can be taken to improve your site's safety level:

1. **Pre-job assessment:** Before the commencement of your project, make sure your crew are qualified. Check the site for any hazards or risks. Also check whether the weather will impact your work on that day.
2. Look for alternatives to working at heights during the design-phase of the project. It is always the safest option to work from the ground.
3. **Fall-proof equipment:** make sure your crew are wearing footwear with good grip. If you are using a ladder, make sure your ladder has been set up correctly at the right access points.
4. Arrange a work-positioning or 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 eg industrial rope access. A fall-arrest system stops a person who has fallen and reduces the impact of the fall eg industrial safety nets or fall arrest harnesses used with lifelines or individual anchors.

If you would like help understanding your duties for site safety in construction contact the team at [Construction Legal](#).

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