

Working at heights

Working at heights can be dangerous and result in serious injury or death. Safe Work Australia states that a fall within a general workplace is a fall from one level to another where there is risk of injury.¹

Commonly, working at height is considered to be when working at heights above two metres, however whilst the risk of permanent and debilitating injury is significantly increased at heights of over two metres, falls from less than one metre may also lead to serious injury. Safe Work Australia considers falls in a general workplace to be a fall from one level to another where there is risk of injury.²

Research conducted by Safe Work Australia shows that of all workers killed between 1 January 2003 and 31 December 2015; 11% of fatalities were due to workers falling from heights, a total of 359 people. 50% of these falls were from a height below 3 metres.



As an employer, it is your responsibility to ensure a safe work place. When it comes to working at heights, this includes acknowledging and mapping any need to work at heights, the risks associated with

this and implementing procedures and safety equipment where appropriate.

As with all risk, it is important to consider the necessity of working at height and determine if the risk can be removed altogether. This may include redesigning the workplace, or modifying work processes to eliminate or reduce the need to work from heights.

Where work at heights cannot be eliminated a series of controls should be implemented to ensure the safety of employees, contractors, sub-contractors, labour hire and visitors to the site. Where necessary, seek professional advice as to what controls are appropriate for your workplace and their installation. Examples of some of the controls that may be implemented are provided below:

- ▼ secure guardrails and fences to any raised or portable platform
- ▼ work positioning systems
- ▼ fall restraint systems
- ▼ fall arrest systems.

Standards Australia dictates that a person who may be exposed to a fall resulting in injury, should be protected by fall arrest equipment.³ Use of such systems should be conducted by sufficiently trained personnel. Additionally, fall safety and arrest equipment must be adequately maintained as per manufacturer guidelines and in conjunction

with AS/NZS 1891.4 Industrial fall-arrest systems and devices Part 4: Selection, use and maintenance.

The danger of working at heights can be impacted by various elements such as weather, terrain and lighting. A risk assessment in a Job Safety Assessment (JSA) should be completed and these factors considered in the JSA accordingly. Ensuring an adequate level of training and competency for those completing this work empowers the employees, contractors, sub-contractors and labour hire workers to assess and implement appropriate measures to guarantee their safety.

For further information on how you can manage the risks of working at heights in your workplace please visit Safe Work Australia at: www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/system/files/documents/1705/mcop-managing-the-risk-of-falls-at-workplaces-v2.pdf

References

Safe Work Australia, 2017, Working at Heights, Safe Work Australia viewed 12/11/2017 <<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/heights>>.

²ibid.

³Standards Australia 2009, Industrial Fall Arrest Systems and Devices – Selection Use and Maintenance, (AS/NZS 1891.4:2009), SAI Global Limited.