

High-risk construction work changes – for PCBUs and principal contractors

Risk exists at any height, and as a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) you must always manage the risk of falls. From **1 July 2026**, construction work that involves a **risk of falling more than two metres** will be classified as **high-risk construction work** in South Australia.

This change lowers the previous threshold of three metres and aligns South Australia with the model WHS Regulations.

What's changing?

High risk construction work requires the **preparation and implementation of a Safe Work Method Statement (SWMS)**.

- » **Old threshold:** A SWMS was required when there was a risk of falling over **three metres**
- » **New threshold:** A SWMS is required when there is a risk of falling over **two metres**

This applies to all construction work, including residential construction.

Why the change?

- » Aligns South Australia with model WHS laws and other Australian states and territories to create clearer more consistent expectations for workers and PCBUs

- » Between 2020 – 2022, almost 150 workers fell more than two metres, with over 100 of these in residential construction
- » Two thirds of falls occurred between two and three metres, the range now captured under the new threshold
- » 1585 workers compensation claims due to falls in the past decade, costing \$64 million
- » Aims to reduce preventable harm by strengthening planning and safety requirements where most injuries occur
- » Ensures working at heights is properly assessed and that effective control measures are in place

Your legal obligations

As a PCBU, you **must** manage the risk of all falls at any height, and you must prepare a SWMS for all high risk construction work activities.

Your SWMS must be:

- » Completed before the work begins
- » Specific to the site and tasks
- » Prepared in consultation with workers

The SWMS must also:

- » **Identify** hazards and associated risks
- » **Detail** practical control measures
- » Be **communicated** to all workers
- » Be **reviewed** and updated if work conditions change
- » Be kept and accessible for the **duration of the work**

As a PCBU, you must provide the principal contractor with a copy of the SWMS for any high-risk construction work you will be undertaking.

Supplying the SWMS early ensures the work can be planned safely, aligns with site wide safety arrangements, and supports a coordinated approach to managing high risk construction activities.

Additional obligations for principal contractors

If you are the principal contractor for a construction project, you have extra responsibilities under WHS Regulations.

Your WHS Management Plan must include:

- » Arrangements for the collection, assessment, monitoring and review of all SWMS used on the project
- » Processes for ensuring SWMS remain current and effective as site conditions change

Reasonable steps you must take:

- » Collect the SWMS for all high-risk construction work carried out on the project
- » Require PCBUs to submit their SWMS before work begins, so it can be reviewed and incorporated into site planning

» Ensure that only work covered by an appropriate SWMS is carried out

» Monitor compliance and take action if the SWMS is not being followed

These duties ensure that safety arrangements are understood and applied consistently across all contractors working on the project.

Transition Period

A transition period applies until **1 July 2026**, giving businesses and contractors time to prepare.

Use this period to:

- » **Review** and update your work at height procedures
- » **Update** SWMS templates to reflect the new 2-metre threshold
- » **Train** supervisors, workers and contractors
- » Ensure **consultation** processes are in place
- » **Assess** all construction tasks to determine if they will now be classified as high risk construction work activities.

More Information

Visit safework.sa.gov.au for guidance materials, training and information on the amended regulations.



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