

Managing the Risk of Falls at Workplaces

Code of Practice Fact Sheet



Government
of South Australia
SafeWork SA

The *Code of Practice – Managing the Risk of Falls at Workplaces* is available on the SafeWork SA website at safework.sa.gov.au. This fact sheet provides a summary of that Code.

Fall hazards are found in many workplaces where work is carried out at height e.g. stacking shelves, working on a roof, unloading a large truck or accessing silos.

Falls can also occur at ground level into holes e.g. trenches or service pits.

Risk management

Preventing people from falling in a workplace can be achieved by adopting a simple risk management process which involves the following four steps:

1. Hazard identification – identify potential fall hazards.
2. Risk assessment – determine how likely it is that people can fall and how serious that may be.
3. Control risks – identify and implement the most appropriate control measure to eliminate or minimise the risk of falling.
4. Review – review control measures to ensure they are working as planned.

Identify hazards

You must identify all areas and tasks in your workplace that could cause a fall injury. This can be achieved through workplace inspections, a review of information (including incident reports) and consultation with workers and, in some circumstances, technical experts.

Tasks and areas that need particular attention are those carried out:

- on any structure or plant being constructed or installed, demolished or dismantled, inspected, tested, repaired or cleaned
- on a fragile surface (e.g. cement sheeting roofs, rusty metal roofs, fibreglass sheeting roofs, skylights)
- on a potentially unstable surface (e.g. areas where there is potential for ground collapse)

- using equipment to work at the elevated level (e.g. when using elevating work platforms or portable ladders)
- on a sloping or slippery surface where it is difficult for people to maintain their balance (e.g. on glazed tiles)
- near an unprotected open edge (e.g. near incomplete stairwells)
- near a hole, shaft or pit into which a worker could fall (e.g. trenches, lift shafts, service pits).

For more information on how to identify fall hazards, refer to pages 6 and 7 of the Code.

Assess risks

A risk assessment will help you determine:

- what could happen if a fall did occur and how likely it is to occur
- the severity of the risk
- whether any existing control measures are effective
- what action you should take to control the risk
- how urgently action needs to be taken.

Refer to page 7 of the Code for a list of matters that should be considered as part of a risk assessment.

A risk assessment is unnecessary if you already know the risk and how to control it. You may be able to carry out a single generic risk assessment if you are responsible for a number of different work areas or workplaces and the fall hazards are the same.

For more information on how to assess the risk of falls refer to page 7 of the Code.

Control risks

There are a number of different ways to control the risks of falls. Fall protection measures must be suited to the particular task and area, and to the severity of the risk. Control measures are needed where there is a risk of injury, irrespective of fall height.

In managing the risks of falls, Regulation 79 of the *Work Health and Safety Regulations 2012 (SA)* requires some specific control measures to be implemented. Where it is reasonably practicable to do so, these must be done in the following order:

1. Provide a fall prevention device (e.g. installing guard rails) if it is reasonably practicable to do so.
2. Provide a work positioning system (e.g. an industrial rope access system) if it is not reasonably practicable to provide a fall prevention device.
3. Provide a fall-arrest system (e.g. a catch platform or safety net) if it is not reasonably practicable to provide a fall prevention device or a work positioning system.

Administrative controls

Administrative controls may be used to support other control measures and may include 'no go' areas, permit systems, the sequencing of work and safe work procedures.

In some cases a combination of control measures may be necessary (e.g. using a safety harness while working from an elevating work platform).

For more information on administrative controls refer to pages 42-43 of the Code.

Review controls

The control measures that are put in place to prevent falls must be reviewed and, if necessary, revised to make sure they work as planned and remain effective.

For more information on reviewing controls refer to page 10 of the Code.

Design of plant and structures

Consideration of the potential risk of falls early in the design of plant or structures can result in the elimination of such risks. Where elimination is not possible, one way to minimise risks at the design stage is to integrate fall prevention systems into the design.

Safety considerations at the design stage should include:

- safe entry to and exit from any work area
- designing permanent guard rails or other forms of edge protection

- future maintenance requirements
- specifying the strength of roof members and other points to which guard rails or anchor points for work positioning systems will be fixed
- specific requirements for particular workers doing subsequent installation, maintenance or repair work
- designing the pre-fabrication of structures on the ground before they are lifted into position.

Refer to page 47 of the Code for more information.

Plant

Safety considerations at the design stage for plant could include:

- providing adequate steps and hand rails on vehicles
- incorporating a fall prevention system in silos and overhead conveyors
- ensuring workers who will be maintaining or cleaning the plant are able to do so safely
- the safety of passengers.

Refer to page 48 of the Code for more information.

Buildings or structures

It is important to consider providing fall prevention systems as part of the building or structure at the design and planning stage.

It is also important for designers and builders to consult, co-operate and co-ordinate with each other to ensure the safe interaction of the different design aspects. Providing information about safety issues is a key component to ensuring proper, adequate and suitable design and installation.

Refer to page 49 of the Code for more information.

The design and planning for the construction stage should include:

- reducing the risk for those working at heights
- reducing the time spent working at heights
- sequencing of the work to be performed at heights
- the location and condition of access roads
- preparation of the ground or floor below the work area
- identification of underground services, including drainage
- provision of permanent safety mesh.

During the planning stage, consideration should also be given to the methods by which maintenance, repairs or cleaning will be undertaken on a building or structure, for example by designing:

- window cleaning bays or gangways integrated into the structural frame
- permanent anchorage and hoisting points into structures where maintenance needs to be undertaken at height.

When planning the site layout, factors that should be considered include:

- preparation of firm, level surfaces below work areas for the support of plant and equipment
- site and condition of access roads
- safe access to and egress from work areas and amenities
- the need for adequate means of escape and rescue in the event of an emergency.

For further information on the elimination and minimisation of risk associated with falls at the planning and design stage for plant and structures, refer to pages 47-49 of the Code.

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