



CONSTRUCTION BLITZ ON FALLS FROM HEIGHTS

Initial project findings – November 2018

SafeWork NSW commenced a twelve month construction blitz on falls from heights in November 2017 in response to an alarming rise in the number of falls from heights incidents reported to us.

The Blitz aimed to raise awareness of the dangers of working at heights, educate employers and workers on best safety practice and secure compliance where necessary.

The Blitz was complemented by a public awareness campaign, educational events for tradies and incentives for small businesses. On-the-spot fines of up to \$3,600 were introduced for those putting workers lives at risk by not protecting them from falls.

Between 2017 and 2018, Inspectors observed an improvement in safety standards for most Blitz checklist items.ⁱ

THE PROBLEM

Falls from heights is the number one killer on NSW construction sites, with the number of falls incidents reported to SafeWork NSW tripling between 2013 and 2016.

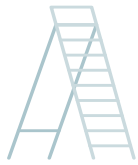
Nine workers were killed in NSW in 2017 and many more received catastrophic injuries as a result of falls from heights.

We looked at three years of incidents reported to SafeWork NSW and found 61% were in the construction industry and that workers mostly fell from a height of between 2 and 4 metres.ⁱⁱ

ⁱ Inspectors observed an improvement over 2018 for 21 of the 29 blitz safety checklist items, when compared to compliance observations in 2017.

ⁱⁱ Falls from heights category 1 and 2 incidents reported to SafeWork NSW between 2014/15 and 2016/17.

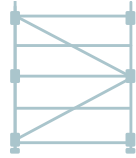
WORKERS MOSTLY FELL FROM (OR THROUGH)



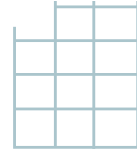
84
Ladders



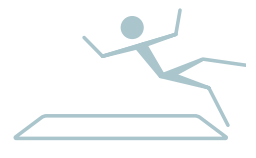
64
Roofs



50
Scaffold



26
Formwork



23
Penetrations

OCCUPATIONS WITH THE MOST FALLS



40
Builders/Carpenters



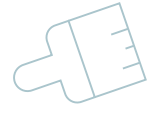
26
Labourers



22
Formworkers



22
Roofers



22
Painters

IMPROVING AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF FALLS RISKS

PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

The public awareness campaign used impactful images and messaging to alert industry to the dangers of working at heights, with three key messages used consistently throughout.



Public awareness involved:

- Blitz specific radio advertising – 4-17 December 2017 on Triple M, WSFM and KIIS
- Blitz specific digital advertising – July and October 2018 with over 980,000 impressions and 5,900 clicks to the SafeWork NSW website
- Safety Starts With You campaign, second-part of a three year mass media campaign - March to June 2018. Voids specific advertising in out-of home (café screens, and posters on-site in construction), social media and digital (radio and display)
- Two Ministerial media releases – covered in Sydney Morning Herald, Channel 7, Prime 7, WIN and various radio stations
- Poster and Blitz calling card – 8,500 distributed. Also translated to Arabic and Chinese Simplified
- SafeWork NSW website updates – throughout campaign
- Emails and safety alerts to industry – throughout campaign
- SafeWork NSW social media channels – 9 posts on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn between July and October 2018. Facebook reached 10,700 people, had 193 engagements and 462 link clicks. Twitter and LinkedIn had 24,500 impressions, 271 engagements and 467 link clicks combined.

BLITZ VISITS

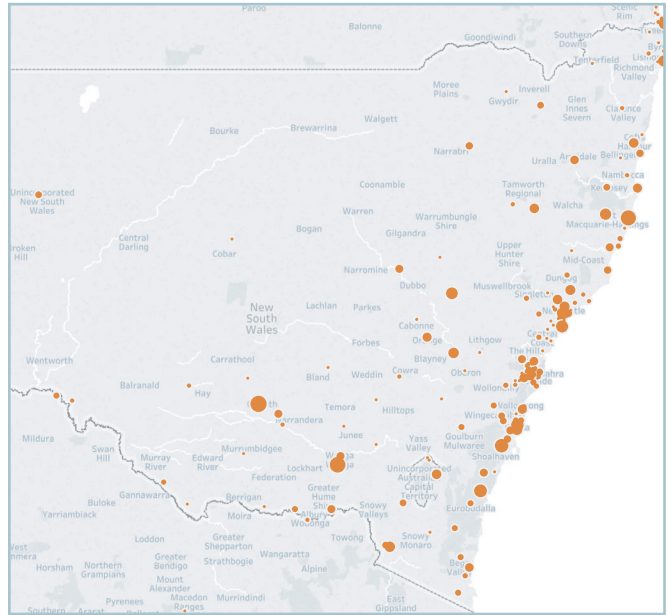
SafeWork NSW Inspectors ‘flooded’ suburbs where there was a high concentration of building work, to talk to employers and workers about how to work safely at heights, and to take enforcement action where appropriate.

Inspectors undertook over 1000 site visits state-wide to look at:

- scaffold compliance
- void/edge protection
- formwork systems
- safe ladder use
- safety planning
- consultation.

Inspectors found a large number of sites where workers were at risk of falls from incomplete scaffolds and unprotected edges. The highest levels of non-compliance involved:

- scaffolds having missing planks, ledgers or hopups,
- inadequate edge protection on building edges and roofs.

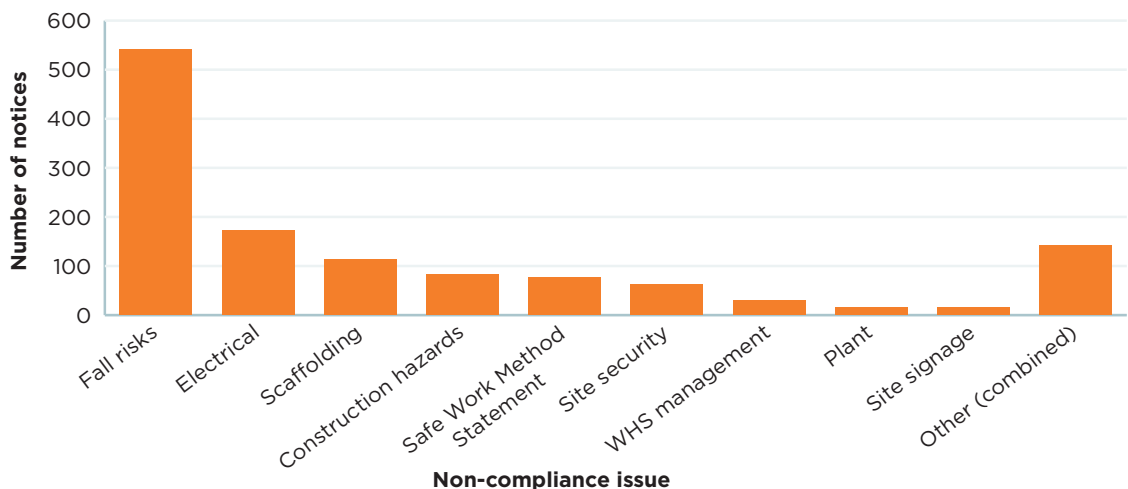


We measured the difference in compliance levels observed when the Blitz first began in 2017, and the level of compliance observed in 2018 and found many improvements as well as some areas with decreasing levels of safety. Overall, Inspectors observed an improvement in compliance of between 1–9% in 21 of the 29 safety checklist items.

NOTICES AND ON-THE-SPOT FINES

Inspectors issued 1258 notices during Blitz visits, including 93 falls related on-the-spot fines to the value of \$265,680. On-the-spot fines were issued if the risk to workers was imminent or serious, or if the workplace was a repeat offender.

Most notices were issued for general falls risks including inadequate or no edge protection, followed by electrical hazards and then non-compliant scaffolds.



52%
scaffolds complete, with no missing components
↑5%ⁱⁱⁱ

80%
scaffolds had adequate access
↑8%

74%
formwork had safe falls systems
↑5%

50%
edges adequately protected
↓7%

66%
voids marked with barriers in place
↓5%

89%
ladders used for appropriate activities
↑1%

75%
have SWMS for high risk work
↑5%

83%
have site induction records
↑7%

ⁱⁱⁱ Percentage change of compliance levels observed in 2018, when compared to 2017 site visits.

WHAT INSPECTORS LOOK FOR ON SCAFFOLDS



Inspectors view scaffolds in relation to what is reasonably practicable for the specific stage of the build. This photo depicts a compliant scaffold for the site conditions and stage of works.

In essence, it has:

- base plates (and sole boards where required) positioned on a flat and sound surface
- the deck is aligned to slab height, or within 300mm
- all working decks have mid and top handrails, with diagonal bracing and toe boards in place
- chain wire and containment netting (mesh) to prevent falling objects
- internal handrails to upper decks and higher handrails (1800mm above upper deck) to facilitate future roof works.

For more comprehensive details, a copy of the checklist used by Inspectors is attached at the end of this report.

EDUCATIONAL EVENTS WITH INDUSTRY AND TRADIES

We talked with industry and tradies to help them better understand their obligations when it comes to protecting workers when working at heights.

These included:

- Safety seminars and tradie nights – 18 events were held state-wide, with over 2500 attendees
- Meetings with industry associations – we met regularly with industry associations and their members
- Safety events – we attended two major safety events to provide advice and/or present as speakers.

INCENTIVES FOR SMALL BUSINESS – REBATES

SafeWork NSW provides a rebate of up to \$500 towards the purchase of equipment to help businesses work at heights safely. Since the start of the blitz, SafeWork NSW has approved 186 rebate applications from construction or construction-related small businesses. The rebates provided were valued at \$86,838 which generated \$99,272 additional investment by businesses on working at heights safety solutions.

Typical equipment purchased included:

- scaffolding
- trestles
- commercially rated ladders
- fall arrest harnesses
- other items associated with working at heights outdoor work.

FUTURE ACTION

Whilst there has been an improvement in safety compliance observed in 2018 when compared to 2017, the level of non-compliance is still unacceptable for some fall protection measures, and there are still far too many workers who are seriously or fatally injured as a result of falls from heights.

With unprecedented infrastructure boom conditions set to continue, and a growing workforce predicted to reach nearly 400,000 by 2022, SafeWork NSW will continue to focus on those high-risk work activities and occupations where most injuries are occurring.

Specific falls from heights initiatives are outlined in the *Towards Zero Falls from Heights Data Insights and Action Plan* on the SafeWork NSW website.

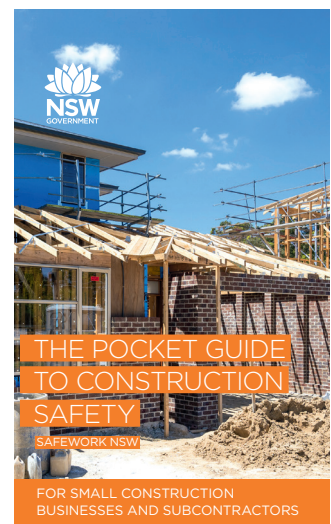
GUIDE FOR SMALL CONSTRUCTION BUSINESSES AND SUBBIES

The *Pocket guide to construction safety* is a great tool for small businesses and subbies, designed to make safety simple.

It covers all major safety obligations, including working at heights, is small enough to fit in your back pocket, and is QR code enabled so you can link electronically to the relevant code of practice for detailed guidance.

The (free) hard copy version is available from our publications hotline on 1300 799 003, or you can view it on the SafeWork NSW website.

For more information on working at heights safely, see www.safework.nsw.gov.au or call 13 10 50.



SAFework NSW INSPECTOR CHECKLIST

CONSTRUCTION FALLS FROM HEIGHTS BLITZ CHECKLIST

Name: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Site Address: _____

Principal Contractor: _____ ABN: _____

Contact Person: _____ Phone: _____

Email address: _____

Scaffold		Y / N	N/A
1	Evidence of competency or licence (for work greater than 4 metres) of scaffolder		
2	Scaffold is complete, with no missing ledgers, planks or hopups		
3	Adequate access/egress to scaffold decks		
4	Gaps between working deck and building edges no greater than 225mm (horizontal)		
5	Gaps between hopups/decks and building edges no greater than 300mm (vertical)		
6	Scaffold is appropriately supported on ground and tied into building		
Voids and edges		Y / N	N/A
7	Voids covered, secured and marked, or physical barriers in place		
8	Adequate system in place for access/egress between levels		
9	Roof rails or perimeter scaffolding in place for roofing works		
10	Edges adequately protected to prevent falls (scaffold or guarding)		
11	Excavations and pits adequately secured to prevent falls (fencing, covers, barriers)		
Formwork		Y / N	N/A
12	Formwork components in good order		
13	Adequate access/egress to formwork decks		
14	Adequate systems in place to prevent falls from formwork edges		
15	Systems in place for construction/dismantling of formwork from below		
Ladders		Y / N	N/A
16	Ladders used for appropriate activities		
17	Ladders in good condition and rated for commercial use		
18	Set up correctly (1:4/grounded/tied at top/etc)		
Mobile scaffolds, EWPS and fall arrest/restraints		Y / N	N/A
19	Mobile scaffolds or EWP's are rated industrial and in good order		
20	Relevant VOC or HRW licences are held by EWP operators		
21	Using fall restraint where possible		
22	Harnesses, lanyards and associated equipment meet Australian standards, are in good order and within manufacturers remove from service date.		
23	Evidence of training for use of harnesses and associated equipment		
Documentation		Y / N	N/A
24	Scaffold handover/Inspection certificates/Scafftags available		
25	Safe work method statements (SWMS) available for high risk work		
26	Induction records for site (including induction of SWMS)		
27	Plant maintenance records are available		
28	Emergency control plan in place		
Consultation		Y / N	N/A
29	Are tool box meetings and site meetings occurring in relation to high risk construction work activity that effects multiple subcontractors.		

Disclaimer

This publication may contain information about the regulation and enforcement of work health and safety in NSW. It may include some of your obligations under some of the legislation that SafeWork NSW administers. To ensure you comply with your legal obligations you must refer to the appropriate legislation.

Information on the latest laws can be checked by visiting the NSW legislation website www.legislation.nsw.gov.au

This publication does not represent a comprehensive statement of the law as it applies to particular problems or to individuals or as a substitute for legal advice. You should seek independent legal advice if you need assistance on the application of the law to your situation.

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