

Work at heights

Construction Blitz 2020



Project findings report – 21 September to 30 November 2020

Overview

Falls from heights is the number one cause of traumatic death on NSW construction sites. Most serious and fatal falls are from roofs, ladders, and scaffolds - from a height of less than 4 metres.

SafeWork inspectors have been undertaking on-site safety blitzes since 2017, focussing on work at heights and other high-risk activities. During our 2020 work at heights blitz, SafeWork NSW Inspectors visited 526 construction sites between 21 September and 30 November to secure compliance and talk with site supervisors, principal contractors and workers about how to work safely from heights. Inspectors issued 700 notices, including on the spot fines for serious falls from heights risks totalling \$127,440.

Any life lost is one life too many

Despite targeted safety interventions in the construction industry over recent years, the number of workers compensation claims and serious injury incidence rates have been on the rise. In the lead-up to the blitz in 2020, there had been 3 fatalities and 25 serious construction falls reported to SafeWork NSW, 8 of which were workers who had fallen through fragile or brittle roofs. Industry must take urgent action to ensure they are appropriately resourced to manage work at heights risks to protect their workers from harm. SafeWork NSW will continue to prioritise working at heights safety under the Building and Construction Work Health and Safety Sector Plan to 2022.

2020 Work at heights in construction safety blitz

Inspectors visited 526 construction sites as part of the 2020 work at heights blitz, and completed 519 safety checklists. 50% of the sites visited were house construction, followed by commercial (17%), mid-high rise (14%) and then “other” (12%), such as solar installations, roof restorations, home renovations/maintenance.

Types of sites visited

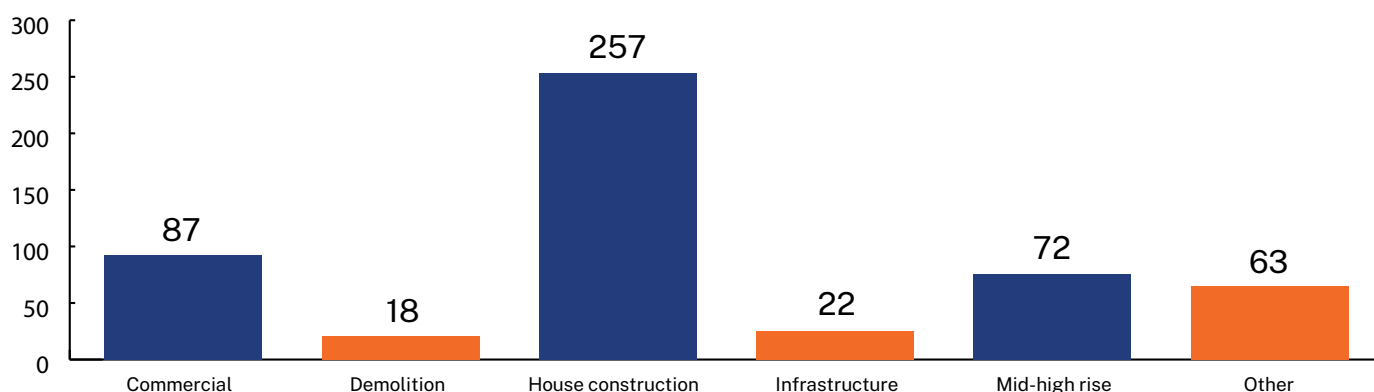
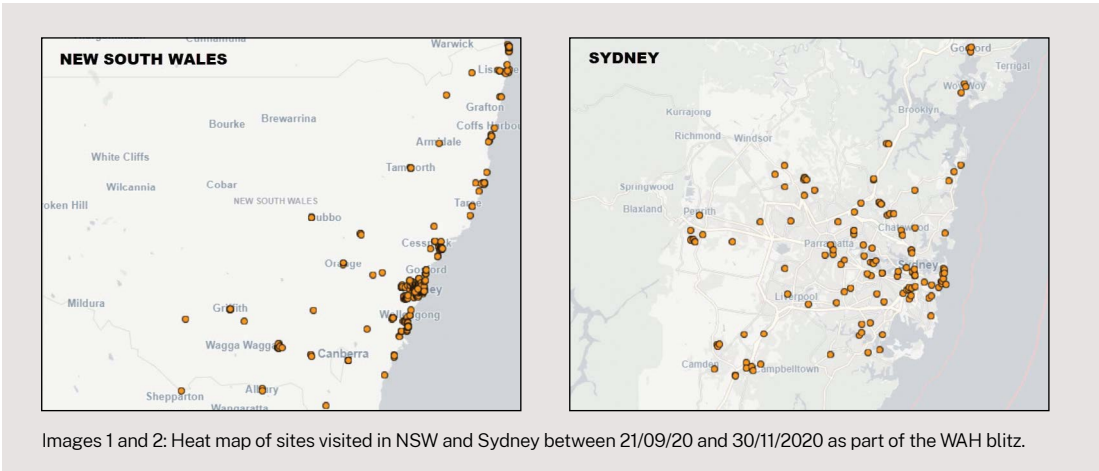


Table 1: Type of site visited as part of the WAH blitz between 21/09/20 and 30/11/2020.

Sites were visited state-wide with the greatest density being in Sydney and its surrounds.



Notices (improvement, prohibition and penalty)

Inspectors took a zero-tolerance approach to those who placed workers lives at risk when working at heights. 700 notices were issued as part of the project visits.

449 of these were improvement notices, 184 were “stop work” prohibition notices and 37 of the 45 penalty notices were on-the-spot fines for serious falls risks totalling \$127,440.

s155 and s171 notices relate to the power of the regulator to obtain information and/or have the employer produce documentation.

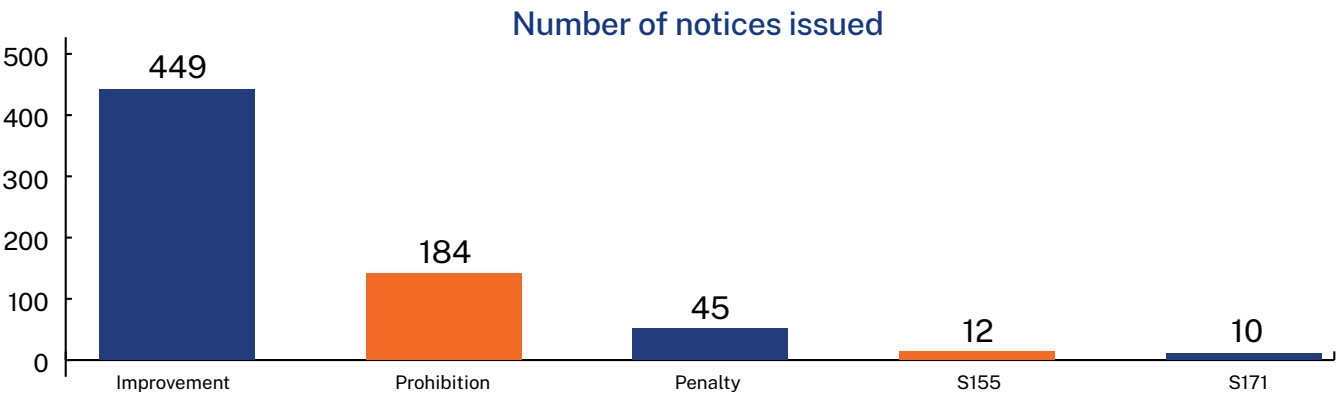


Table 2: Notices issued by type as part of the WAH blitz between 21/09/20 and 30/11/2020.

WAH in construction safety checklist (key highlights)

Inspectors completed a safety checklist to measure the level of compliance with heights safety on each site.

Below are the key highlights from these safety checklist questions. Compliance percentages are representative of overall state-wide observations.

Voids and Edges

The safety around working near voids and edges remains a concern, with around a third of all sites visited having inadequate or no fall protection in place.

32% Voids were not covered, secured, marked, nor had a physical barrier in place.

28% Sites had inadequate fall protection in place for access/egress between levels.

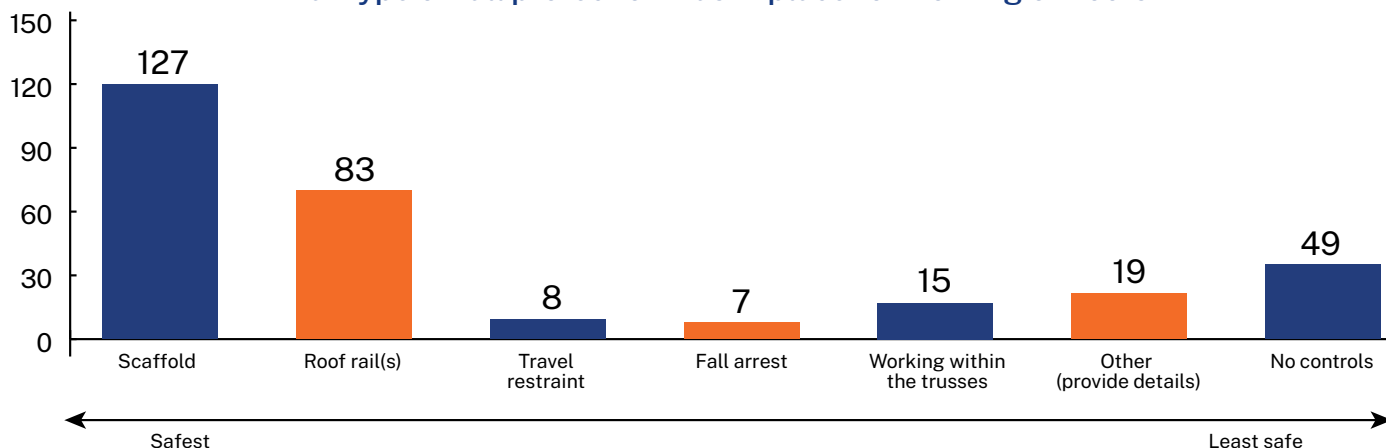
37% Edges (e.g. balconies, slabs, floors) were not adequately protected to prevent falls (e.g. no scaff, guarding or work positioning system in place).

Roofs

Inspectors observed that 68% of sites had the safest roof work controls in place, being scaffold or roof rails. 5% were using harnesses and 16% were within the trusses. Inspectors observed that some “other” fall prevention controls in place were adequate, including elevating work platforms or scissor lifts. However, some were inadequate, such as single planks between ladders, incomplete roof rails or non-compliant scaffolds.

16% of sites had no working at heights controls in place for roof work.

What type of fall protection was in place for working on roofs



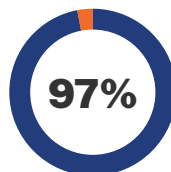
Ladders

Ladders generally have a short duration use and therefore lower inspector observation rates on construction sites. As such, whilst safety compliance seems to be higher than some other activities, SafeWork NSW continues to see a high number of ladder serious incidents and major workers compensation claims.



✖ Poor Compliance

- 14%** Ladders were not used for appropriate activities.
- 14%** Extension ladders were not set up correctly (e.g not 1:4, not grounded, not tied at top etc).

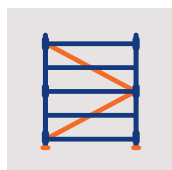


✔ Good Compliance

97% Ladders in good condition and rated for commercial use.

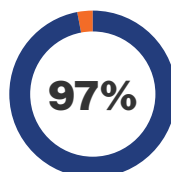
Scaffold

Incomplete scaffolds and unlicensed tradies removing scaffold components continues to be a risk on NSW construction sites.



✖ Poor Compliance

- 45%** Scaffold not complete, with missing ledgers, planks or hop-ups.
- 17%** Scaffold not appropriately supported on the ground, nor tied into building.



✔ Good Compliance

97% Scaffolds had loads within its rated capacity.

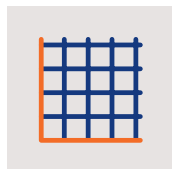


✖ Poor Compliance

- 28%** Scaffold has been altered by unlicensed workers
- 28%** Had gaps between the working deck and building edge greater than 225mm

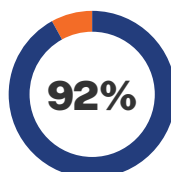
Formwork

Inadequate access/egress and fall prevention systems were the greatest risks identified by inspectors when it came to formwork.



✖ Poor Compliance

- 31%** Inadequate access/egress to formwork decks.
- 44%** Inadequate systems in place to prevent falls from formwork edges.



✔ Good Compliance

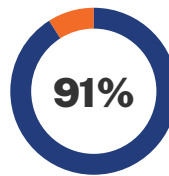
92% Formwork components in good order.

Documentation & Consultation



✖ Poor Compliance

- 21%** Had no safe work method statement (SWMS) available for work at heights (above 2m).
- 31%** SWMS not being followed for work at heights.



✔ Good Compliance

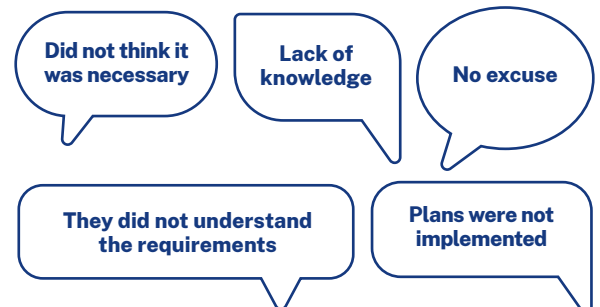
- 91%** The workers had been consulted on work at heights risks.

Self-reported reasons for non-compliance

Inspectors asked the principal contractor or site supervisor why they were non-compliant for key checklist questions. Inspectors recorded free-text responses, indicating the most common excuses.

The most common reasons were:

- they had no excuse
- they did not understand the requirements
- they did not have enough time to implement safety controls.



Conclusion

Falls from heights remains the biggest cause of traumatic death on NSW construction sites. The messaging to industry for this blitz focussed on work near voids, edges and on roofs—including fragile and brittle roofs as a result of the high number of serious incidents reported to SafeWork NSW that year, and previous observations of high non-compliance.

Inspector observations during 2020, along with the latest workers compensation data, indicates a continued focus is required for work at heights safety, in order to secure safety and compliance for work undertaken near edges, on scaffolds, roof work and ladder use.

SafeWork will continue to work with major industry stakeholders through its state-wide dedicated construction teams to increase awareness and improve overall safety standards and commitment to working at heights safety.

What you can do to work safely at heights

Principal contractors and site supervisors must ensure they have adequately planned for safety prior to commencing work, consulted and communicated safety requirements with workers, and have the appropriate safety equipment available.

This may include:

- Eliminating the need to work from heights where possible
- Using a suitable work platform such as scaffold, boom lifts or scissor lifts
- Providing adequate edge protection by using jump screens, scaffold or guardrails and ensuring **ALL** components are in place
- Ensuring scaffolds are installed and inspected by a competent person, and that a handover certificate is provided before use
- Securely covering and visibly marking, or edge protecting all open penetrations in formwork or concrete slabs
- Providing workers with safe means of access and egress to work areas
- Only using fall restraint or fall arrest systems (harnesses) when edge protection is not reasonably practicable
- Not allowing unlicensed workers to remove scaffold components
- Considering whether an elevating work platform or scaffold would be safer and more efficient than using a ladder.



See www.safework.nsw.gov.au for how to make safety simple in your workplace or call **13 10 50**.

Download a simple safety checklist




SCAFFOLD INSPECTION CHECKLIST

This checklist can be used by principal contractors or scaffolders to conduct a basic inspection to look for common scaffold deficiencies and hazards. Principal Contractors/builders have a duty to provide and maintain a working environment that is safe and without risks to health and safety, so far as is reasonably practicable. This includes the provision of safe systems of work and plant that is adequately maintained.

On-the-spot fines of up to \$3,600 for businesses and \$720 for individuals may be issued to those placing workers lives at risk by not adequately protecting them when working at heights, not having a scaffold inspected by a competent person, or allowing unlicensed workers to undertake scaffolding work, including altering a scaffold.

The following guidance can help you prepare and plan for a safe, effective and compliant scaffold on site.

ADMINISTRATION

Name: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____



Site address: _____

Principal contractor scaffold supplier/installer: _____

Manage your scaffold safety by ensuring:

- the scaffold is only erected, altered and dismantled by a worker with the appropriate scaffolding high risk work (HRW) licence. You can check a HRW licence is valid by visiting www.licencecheck.nsw.gov.au
- site inductions and ongoing toolbox talks should clearly state that unlicensed workers are prohibited from altering or removing components from the scaffold.
- workers, including contractors, need to be consulted about site rules, including the safe use of the scaffold and who to contact if it needs altering or repair.
- the scaffold must be inspected and written confirmation (eg handover certificate) or a record of inspection be provided at the following intervals:
 - before first use,
 - prior to use after alterations or repairs,
 - after adverse weather (eg high winds or storms) or an incident that could affect scaffold integrity or stability, and
 - at regular intervals not exceeding 30 days
- the written confirmation (eg handover certificate) should be kept on site until the scaffold has been dismantled
- the scaffolders or a competent person has provided an adequate safe work method statement (SWMS) before starting any high risk construction work
- work is undertaken in accordance with that SWMS provided
- the project is planned and sequenced to minimise trades working above others on the scaffold.

LET'S TALK SAFETY

SOLAR INSTALLERS SAFETY CHECKLIST

Businesses that sell, design and install solar systems have duties to provide and maintain a working environment that is safe and without risk to health and safety, so far as is reasonably practicable.

This checklist can help you prepare and plan for the safe installation of photovoltaic solar systems.

This checklist is not exhaustive and should be used in conjunction with the SafeWork NSW Guide to Safe Solar Panel Installation, relevant codes of practice and the SafeWork NSW solar installers video safety alerts risks of falls and electrical risks.

Solar installers face on-the-spot fines of up to \$720 for individuals and \$3,600 for businesses for not protecting workers from falls from heights and electrical risks.

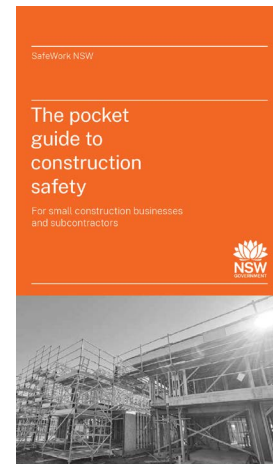
Name: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Site Address: _____



Preparation and the working environment	Y	N
Workers have been consulted regarding site specific information/controls e.g. toolbox talk. An exclusion zone has been established around the work area, to prevent unauthorised persons, such as the homeowner, neighbours or children, accessing work areas.		
Electrical work is being undertaken or appropriately supervised by a licenced electrician (e holds the correct Fair Trading licence).		
A site specific safe work method statement has been prepared for high-risk construction work e.g. addressing falls and electrical risks.		
An emergency plan has been prepared for roof works and is site-specific.		
Workers have been trained in working at heights, applying SWMS, emergency response procedures and other skills, as required.		
Workers have been provided with sun-safety equipment e.g. hats, sunscreen, long sleeved shirts, sunglasses.		

LET'S TALK SAFETY

Download the pocket guide or order your hard copy version




Hold one of our toolbox talks

Toolbox Talk

Using Ladders



About this toolbox talk

This toolbox talk can be delivered by construction supervisors and is designed to raise awareness about mental health in construction, including how to recognise the signs of mental health risks and mental ill-health in colleagues, and provide examples of healthy coping strategies. This toolbox talk is one example of how to introduce mental health discussions and consultation with workers.

A person in control of a business or undertaking (PCBU) has the responsibility to ensure the safety of workers, including consulting with workers and providing the appropriate safety systems and equipment on-site.

Planning for safety, using safe work method statements (SWMS), holding toolbox talks and providing safety equipment that eliminates or controls the risk, helps ensure workers go home safely at the end of the day.

On-the-spot fines of up to \$3,600 apply for failing to protect workers from the risk of falls from heights.

Include these workers in your talk

- Sub-contractors
- Labourers
- Employees
- Labour hire workers
- Trade supervisors

Preparing for the talk

- Choose whether you will cover either an A-frame style step ladder or extension ladder for this talk - you can do the other one next time.
- Depending on what you decide, have an A-frame style step ladder or extension ladder available for the demonstration.

Check the ladder is in good condition and industrial rated (IDGRG).

If you choose an extension ladder, have safety equipment on hand such as a portable ladder bracket and suitable ties to secure the ladder.



Find a quiet area, free from loud noise, so that your workers can hear you.

Have a pen and notebook to jot down any safety suggestions from workers.

Print out the SafeWork NSW "Working at heights in construction" web page to hand out to workers - or send them the web link.


Consider showing the "Safe use of ladders" SafeWork NSW video on YouTube or send workers the web link.

NSW Government

Toolbox Talk

Using Scaffolds



About this toolbox talk

This toolbox talk can be delivered by construction supervisors, and provides basic safety tips for workers who work on large prefabricated modular scaffolds.

A person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) has the responsibility to ensure the safety of workers, including consulting with workers and providing the appropriate safety systems and equipment on-site.

Planning for safety, using safe work method statements (SWMS), holding toolbox talks and providing safety equipment that eliminates or controls the risk, helps ensure workers go home safely at the end of the day.

Only a licensed scaffolder can erect, alter or dismantle a scaffold where the risk of a person or object falling is more than 4 metres. This includes both large prefabricated modular scaffolds and mobile scaffolds.

On-the-spot fines of up to \$3,600 apply for altering a scaffold without a licence or failing to protect workers from the risk of falls from heights.

Include these workers in your talk

- Sub-contractors
- Labourers
- Employees
- Labour hire workers
- Trade supervisors

Preparing for the talk

- Have a prefabricated modular scaffold available for the practical demonstration.
- Check the scaffold is in good condition. If it has missing components, you need to ensure these are fixed by a licenced scaffolder, or the incomplete sections removed off to workers.



Find a quiet area, free from loud noise, so that your workers can hear you.

Have a pen and notebook to jot down any safety suggestions from workers.

Print out the SafeWork NSW "Working at heights in construction" web page to hand out to workers - or send them the web link.


Consider showing a "Scaffold Safety" video such as this - or send workers the video web link.

NSW Government

Toolbox Talk

Mentally healthy workplaces in Construction



About this toolbox talk

This toolbox talk can be delivered by construction supervisors and is designed to raise awareness about mental health in construction, including how to recognise the signs of mental health risks and mental ill-health in colleagues, and provide examples of healthy coping strategies. This toolbox talk is one example of how to introduce mental health discussions and consultation with workers.

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On-the-spot fines of up to \$3,600 apply for altering a scaffold without a licence or failing to protect workers from the risk of falls from heights.

Include these workers in your talk

- Sub-contractors
- Labourers
- Employees
- Labour hire workers
- Trade supervisors

Preparing for the talk

- You don't have to be an expert to talk with your workers about mental health.
- Whilst you can't control what's happening in workers' private lives, you must, under the work health and safety legislation, minimise the risk of psychosocial hazards at work.

Familiarise yourself with what psychosocial work hazards are by reading the SafeWork NSW Code of Practice for Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work and the SafeWork NSW Mental Health in Construction Fact Sheet.

When you are ready for your toolbox talk, find a quiet area, free from loud noise so that your workers can hear you.

Have a pen and notebook to jot down any safety suggestions from workers.

Print out the SafeWork NSW poster 'Let's Build Better Mental Health in Construction', to put up in your workplace.

Consider watching or showing workers the Mental Health Challenges and Opportunities in the Building and Construction Sector SafeWork NSW video on YouTube.

NSW Government

Listen to a podcast

