

10/09/2018

Fatality

- **Incident date:** 23/08/2018
- **Event:** Fall from height through plastic roof sheeting
- **Location:** Tomago in Northern NSW

Incident Overview

A 19-year-old first year apprentice electrician was on the roof of a single storey commercial building, assisting with the installation of solar panels. The worker stepped on a plastic roof sheet and fell approximately 7 metres. The rope line had excessive slack between the worker and the anchorage point. The excessive slack in the rope line allowed the worker to fall the 7 metres to the concrete slab below.

The worker sustained multiple serious injuries from the incident. SafeWork NSW and NSW Ambulance responded to the incident and the worker was conveyed to hospital but later died from his injuries.



View of the broken roof sheeting from within the building.

The site

The site is located at Tomago in Northern NSW. The activity being undertaken at the time was the installation of solar panels on a commercial building. A solar panel installation company was engaged to undertake the work for the commercial business.

The investigation

- SafeWork NSW Inspectors responded to the incident.
- SafeWork NSW has commenced an investigation to determine the cause and circumstances of the incident.

Our [Prosecution Guidelines \(January 2018\)](#) outline our approach to prosecutions and Safe Work Australia's [National Compliance and Enforcement Policy](#) provides guidance on our approach to compliance. These documents set out factors that will be considered in determining the investigative approach and appropriate outcome.

Safety Information

Businesses and workers are reminded of their duty to identify hazards and manage risks to health and safety in accordance with the provisions of the [Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#) and [Work Health and Safety Regulation 2017](#).

Each year SafeWork NSW respond to incidents where workers have died or been seriously injured from falls from heights. Many of these incidents involve falling through brittle or fragile roof material.

Businesses are reminded to consider reasonable and practicable control measures to manage the risk of falls.

Before commencing work on an existing roof, carry out an inspection from the ground to determine:

- the presence and condition of sky lights, plastic roof sheeting and other brittle roof sheeting such as asbestos cement sheeting.
- the presence and condition of safety mesh.

When determining whether roof surfaces are safe to walk on, consider the product materials and method of fixing, including any possible deterioration in strength. Note: products may become brittle and fixings may become less rigid over time.

Control measures to prevent a person from falling through a non-trafficable roof or skylight include:

- plan the work to avoid accessing unsafe areas
- work from a solid construction to avoid standing on the roof itself
- install temporary work platforms (crawling boards) and roof ladders as appropriate
- install barriers, such as guard rails or covers, that are secured and labelled with warning signs
- install safety mesh when installing the roof sheeting
- install a fall arrest system (harness system) which has adequately-installed anchorage points, along with training and instruction in the use.
- ensure workers using an adjustable length fall arrest system are competent and aware that the system is intended to provide protection against falling through the roof, not just falls off the edge, and therefore they need to adjust the length to limit slack as they move.

Ensure the selected control measures are being consistently applied, and review the control measures as work progresses.

Further information

Please refer to the following guidance materials:

- Our guide to [working safely at heights](#) includes information on managing the risks of falls, including codes of practice and guides to working on roofs.
- [Safe work on roofs - Part 1: commercial and industrial buildings code of practice](#)
- [Safety Alert - Falls through skylights and plastic roof sheeting](#)
- Australian Standard series AS/NZS 4994 – Temporary edge protection
- Australian Standard AS/NZS 1891.4 Industrial fall-arrest systems and devices Part 4: Selection use and maintenance

About this information release

We have issued this information to draw attention to the occurrence of a fatality in the Commercial Roofing industry. Investigations are ongoing and further information may be published as it becomes available.

The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing. Users are reminded of the need to ensure any information upon which they rely is up to date and to check the currency of the information with the appropriate SafeWork NSW officer or the user's independent adviser. No conclusions should be drawn from the information in this publication about the cause of the incident or the culpability of any party.

All photographs were taken by SafeWork NSW.