

6/12/2018

Serious Incident

- **Incident date:** 10/09/2018
- **Event:** Fall from height through roof
- **Location:** Newcastle East

Incident Overview

A 26 year-old labourer was on the roof of a home helping remove asbestos cement corrugated roof sheeting when one of the sheets gave way and he fell approximately 4 metres.

The fall-arrest system used did not prevent the worker from hitting the wooden floor below. The worker sustained a suspected broken wrist.

SafeWork NSW and NSW Ambulance responded to the incident and the worker was taken to hospital and received treatment for his injuries.



Images of where the asbestos roof sheeting gave way from outside and inside the residence.

The site

The site is located at Newcastle East. The activity being undertaken at the time was the removal of asbestos roof sheeting on a residential dwelling. The site is under the control of a principal contractor with a sub-contractor engaged to undertake demolition and asbestos removal at the site.

The investigation

SafeWork NSW Inspectors responded to 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 their 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 roof material. Asbestos cement roof sheeting is known to become brittle with age.

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

Before starting work on an existing roof, carry out an inspection (from below) to determine:

- the presence and condition of non-trafficable sheeting such as asbestos cement sheeting and other brittle roof sheeting such as sky lights or plastic roof sheeting
- for residential properties, the spacing and condition of roof purlins or trusses, including any gaps in purlins
- for commercial properties, the presence and condition of safety mesh.

When determining whether roofs are safe to walk on, consider that product materials may become brittle with age 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 to work from below whenever possible
- plan the work to avoid accessing unsafe or non-trafficable areas
- work from an elevated work platform or boom lift 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 (traveller) fall arrest system are competent and aware that the rope line is to have minimal slack, to protect them in the event they fall through, when walking or working on roofs and are aware of the pendulum effect when using single anchorage points.

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

Further information

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
- Incident information releases, including *Fall through plastic roof sheeting 23 August 2018*

About this information release

We have issued this information to draw attention to the occurrence of a serious incident in the 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.