



TOOLBOX INFORMATION SESSION

WORKING AT HEIGHTS

INTRODUCTION

Work at height accidents are usually serious and often result in disabling injuries and even death.

Many of us assume that work at height injuries and fatalities occur as a result of falls from high buildings and structures but they often occur from falls between two to four metres.

Today we will discuss:-

- how to correctly use ladders and mobile work platforms; and
- the use of fall restraint equipment.

PORTABLE LADDERS

The most commonly used and abused equipment for work at heights is the portable ladder.

Ladders should only be used as a means of access from one height to another. They are not designed to be a work platform but can be used to carry out light tasks providing a three point of contact is maintained with the ladder at all times.

Accidents with ladders often occur because of poor positioning. Ladders should be positioned on a firm, level surface at an angle of 75 degrees.

You should never position a ladder:

- in front of outward opening doors;
- against a window pane; or
- on top of boxes, loose bricks or concrete blocks to gain extra height.

When using a ladder you should:

- always face the ladder when climbing up or down it;
- only move up or down the ladder one rung at a time;
- always keep a three-point of contact;
- keep your body centred within the ladder stiles; and
- climb off the ladder if you need to reposition it.

You should never:

- use a ladder in high winds unless in an emergency;
- stand any higher than 900 mm from the top of the ladder;
- straddle the top rung;
- “rock” or “walk” the ladder to reposition it; or
- carry tools or equipment in your hands while climbing the ladder.

MOBILE WORK PLATFORMS

Boom type elevating work platforms (cherry pickers) and scissor lifts are used as an alternative to mobile scaffolds.

If you are using a boom type elevating platform where the boom length is 11m or more, then you must hold a licence issued by the regulator (e.g. Workplace Health and Safety Queensland [WHSQ] or WorkCover NSW)

Providing you have been adequately trained there are no restrictions on using scissor lifts.

You are allowed to work from the basket of a boom type elevating work platform but **only certified operators or those that have been deemed as Competent are permitted to operate the controls and position the bucket.**

When using an elevating work platform you should:

- barricade under and around the elevating work platform to prevent other people being struck by the boom;
- place all tools and equipment in bags or buckets to prevent trip hazards and items falling out;
- only enter or exit the basket via the gate;
- keep the basket gate closed and locked while working from inside the basket;
- wear a full body harness attached to a designated anchor point located inside the basket; and
- keep the front of the basket within 300 mm of the work area to prevent reaching over the basket edge.

To prevent you from being electrocuted, mobile work platforms must be kept clear of live electrical power lines.

You must not allow any part of the platform to get within:

- 2 metres of electric distribution wires on poles;
- 6 metres of electric transmission wires on towers.

You should never exceed the safe working limit of the basket which is:

- 200 kg for a fibreglass basket; and
- 250 kg for a steel basket.

To prevent the work platform tipping over it should not be positioned too close to excavations. You should make sure:

- the work platform is setback at least one metre from the edge of the excavation for each metre of excavation depth; and
- the outriggers are fully extended and packed.

FORKLIFT CAGES

Specially designed forklift attached cages can be used for access to heights providing the cage is built to Australian Standards and is fitted with proper guard rails and an access gate.

You must make sure the forklift cage is:

- correctly positioned onto the forklift tynes; and
- locked into position so it cannot slide off the tynes.

You must:

- always wear a full body harness attached to an anchor point located inside the cage;
- never stand on the forklift tynes; and
- never use a forklift pallet as a work platform.

FALL ARREST EQUIPMENT

Safety Harnesses come in two main types:

- Fall Restraint which comes with a lanyard that effectively reaching an edge and prevents you from falling.
- Fall Arrest which allows you to actually fall.

Safety Harnesses should be worn whenever there is a risk of falling from heights. It must be used:

- when other means of protection, such as guard railing, is impractical; or
- to provide additional protection.

The main reason for using fall protection equipment is to limit the distance of any fall and minimise the risk of injury.

A **fall arrest harness** slows the rate of fall and spreads the shock over a large area of the body. This enables the fall to be stopped or arrested without causing bodily injury. However, the **maximum free fall distance allowed is two metres**. Free fall distances greater than this can result in bodily injury.

The safety harness must be attached to:

- a strap or belt lanyard which has a built-in shock absorber; or
- a self-retracting lanyard which has a built-in inertia brake.

The other end of the lanyard must be attached to a static line or anchor point.

The length of the lanyard and the position of the anchor point determines the amount of free-fall.

When using a safety harness you must:

- check the harness for any signs of wear or damage to the fabric and stitching;
- check the lanyard is firmly attached to the harness;
- connect the lanyard to a static line or a secure anchorage point;
- make sure the anchor point is positioned above where you are working and not below; and
- if you are using a strap or belt lanyard ensure there is a minimum of slack in the lanyard so that you cannot fall any further than two metres.

SUMMARY

Serious injury or death can easily result from work at height accidents.

Ladders are a means of access from one height to another and are not intended to be a temporary work platform.

If a ladder is used to carry out brief and light tasks you must maintain a three point of contact with the ladder at all times.

Mobile elevating work platforms, and forklift cages should be used for work at heights where there is no fixed work platform.

Always check the condition of this equipment before it is used.

Never overload mobile work platforms.

Safety harnesses should be worn whenever other means of protection, such as guard railing, is impractical or to provide additional protection.