INFORMATION SHEET

BUILDING SERVICES

Ref: LEG 18-12
Current at November 2018

MANAGING THE RISKS OF FALLING FROM ROOFS

Falls are a major cause of death and serious injury in construction. There are fall hazards wherever work is carried out at height. This Information Sheet provides advice on the hazards and control measures associated with work on existing roofs, including work on fragile roofs.

What are the main fall hazards?

Before starting work on a roof, it is important that you carry out a risk assessment to identify all the hazards that exist and to determine what you might need to do prevent a fall.

Fall hazards to consider include:

- unprotected edges
- fragile roof surfaces (see ***Fragile Roofs*** below)
- holes, vents and other penetrations through which a person could fall
- weather conditions such as wind and rain (for example being blown over the edge or slipping on a wet roof surface)
- trip hazards (for example roof components, protrusions, extension leads), and
- overbalancing or losing grip on steep pitched or sloping roofs.

Fragile Roofs

Roofs are likely to be fragile if they are constructed of the following materials:

- asbestos and other fibre cement roofing sheets
- polycarbonate or plastic roofing sheets
- glass, including wired glass
- chipboard or similar material where rotted
- wood slabs, slates and tiles
- skylights, particularly those that can be difficult to see in certain light conditions or when hidden by paint
- liner panels on built-up sheeted roofs
- metal sheets and fasteners where corroded
- any material that can be highly corroded.

It is very important to also consider the possibility of penetrations such as vents, hatches, skylights which could be difficult to see in low light conditions or if hidden by paint, insulation batts or accumulated dirt.

Roof materials should be treated as fragile unless a competent person has confirmed they are not. Do not assume that any part of the roof can be relied on to bear the weight of a person. This includes the roof ridge and battens or purlins.

What do I need to do to manage the risk of falling?

Health and safety legislation prescribes that protection must be provided if there is a risk of falling off exposed edges such as the perimeter of the roof or through any fragile materials or penetrations.

The risk of falling must be managed using the most effective control measures that are reasonably practicable, in accordance with the hierarchy of control measures prescribed in your local State or Territory workplace health and safety legislation.

Highest in the prescribed hierarchy is that fall risks must be eliminated, so far as is reasonably practicable. This means avoiding the need to work at height, for example by installing air-conditioning units at ground level. Another possibility is doing as much of the work as possible on the ground or on a solid construction.

If working at height cannot be avoided, next in the prescribed hierarchy of control measures is to use a passive fall prevention device such as a guardrail, scaffold, elevating work platform and/or secure covers.

Where it is not reasonably practicable to use a passive fall prevention device to reduce the risk of falling, next in the prescribed hierarchy of control measures is the use of work positioning systems. Examples include a safety harness and lanyard set-up in travel restraint mode to prevent workers from reaching an edge where they could fall.

If a work positioning is not reasonably practicable, a fall-arrest system designed to reduce the severity of injury in a fall may be used. Examples include catch platforms and individual fall-arrest systems consisting of harnesses and adequate anchorage points.

Once you have determined what is reasonably practicable to control fall risks for your specific circumstances you will need to install or set-up the risk control measures.

This should include informing your workers so they understand the nature of the hazards and how to properly use the risk control measures that you have implemented. This should also include informing workers on the content of any relevant safe work method statements for the work and emergency response procedures.

It is also important to provide such supervision as is necessary to make sure the work is carried out in accordance with the risk control measures and to rectify any unsafe work practices as soon as possible.

How do I know what is acceptable?

To find out what is reasonably practicable to reduce fall risks for your specific circumstances and to comply with health and safety obligations you will need to refer to your local fall prevention code of practice or other guidance available for preventing of falls from roofs, including work in housing construction.

Information is available from your State or Territory health and safety authority's website:

- ACT www.accesscanberra.act.gov.au
- New South Wales: www.safework.nsw.gov.au
- Northern Territory www.worksafe.nt.gov.au
- Queensland: www.worksafe.qld.gov.au
- South Australia: www.safework.sa.gov.au
- Tasmania www.worksafe.tas.gov.au
- Victoria: www.worksafe.vic.gov.au
- Western Australia: www.commerce.wa.gov.au

For further clarification and information HIA members can contact HIA's Building Services team on hia_technical@hia.com.au