

6/11/2023

Dangerous scaffold incident

5 October 2023

A section of scaffold for a multi-unit residential project has separated from the building face and come to rest against low voltage distribution powerlines. It appears scaffold ties were removed resulting in serious immediate risk of collapse.



Scaffolding looking west



Scaffolding looking east

The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing and the findings are not yet confirmed. SafeWork NSW has commenced an investigation in response to the incident to determine its cause and circumstances. No conclusions should be drawn from the information in this publication about the cause of the incident or the culpability of any party.

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Safety information

PCBUs are reminded to consider reasonable and practicable control measures to identify hazards and manage the risk of scaffold collapse:

Ensure:

- the scaffold is adequately tied to its supporting structure, in accordance with instructions from a competent person. Consult with the scaffold designer, manufacturer, supplier, or an engineer, and prevent unauthorised removal or changes by workers on site
- to develop systems of work that allow construction activities such as bricklaying, painting, rendering, glazing, and cladding installation to be completed without unplanned changes to or removal of scaffold ties, e.g., relocate ties so they do not interfere with the work. Examples of systems of work, include and are not limited to:
 - providing all workers adequate information, instruction, training and supervision regarding the control measures required to prevent the removal of ties and any other unauthorised alterations that could lead to the collapse of the scaffold
 - workers completing a visual check of the scaffold daily before use and reporting any defects or issues for rectification
 - regular inspection of scaffold ties to check they are not modified or altered by unauthorised people (e.g., finishing trades who may loosen, relocate or remove ties to gain access to walls and openings)
 - all workers completing a site-specific induction and are trained in the appropriate safe work method statement (SWMS)
- to engage a competent person who holds the same or higher class of high-risk work licence appropriate to the class of scaffolding to regularly inspect the scaffold, at least every 30 days, to ensure it has not been modified or altered by unauthorised persons.
- a handover certificate must be provided before first use of the scaffold after scaffolders have completed their scaffolding work i.e. after a new scaffold has been erected, or an existing scaffold has been repaired or altered. Examples of alterations requiring an inspection and new handover certificate include:
 - adding/removing additional bays or lifts
 - changing ties or tie locations
 - changing platforms, hop-ups and decking component locations
 - changing edge protection or containment

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- partial disassembly or removing components (e.g., create an access opening)
- the competent person when erecting and handing over a scaffold for use on site must consider the following:
 - provision and maintenance of sufficient ties of adequate strength for the loads, including wind load
 - ensure the scaffold is stable at all times, including during erection, in situ, during and after any alterations, and when dismantling
 - ensure altering or partially dismantling the scaffold does not weaken it, e.g., removing returns or adjacent bays may require additional ties or bracing on the remaining scaffold
 - scaffolds are not left in a state of weakness when installing or dismantling the scaffolds (e.g., removing returns as they act like ties, or removing ties in preparation for dismantling)
 - ensure the scaffold can withstand all anticipated loads, including the weight of workers, all stored material and any loads due to weather such as wind and rain

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.

Statistics

After conducting 428 Scaff Safe 2021 project site visits, SafeWork NSW compiled a report highlighting many unsafe practices in scaffolding. Some key findings include:

- Principal Contractors had allowed workers to access incomplete scaffolds at 49% of sites
- 43% of sites had working decks with missing planks, ledgers or hop-ups
- 43% of sites had missing mid rails
- 32% of sites did not have a handover certificate (or written confirmation) by a competent person
- 30% of sites had scaffolds that appeared to have been altered by unlicensed tradies – mostly bricklayers.

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Incident Information Release

SafeWork NSW

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Related guidance material

- [Scaffold Inspection Checklist](#)
- [Scaffolding Industry Safety Standard](#)
- [Scaffolding Hazards - SafeWork NSW](#)
- [High risk work licenses - Scaffolding](#)
- [Erecting, altering and dismantling scaffolding - Part 1: Prefabricated steel modular scaffolding](#)
- [The pocket guide to construction safety](#)
- [AS 4576:2020 Guidelines for scaffolding](#)

Further information

- [Traumatic event management plan](#)
- [Speak Up Save Lives app](#)
- NSW Government's [Mental health at work](#)
- Subscribe to [SafeWork NSW newsletters and updates](#)

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