



FALLING OBJECTS FACT SHEET

Overview

This fact sheet provides general guidance for persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) and workers on managing risks to health and safety posed by falling objects.

Disclaimer

Note: this fact sheet provides general information only and should not be used as a substitute for seeking professional legal advice for your specific circumstances. The contents of this fact sheet are correct and based on available information at the time of writing. However, there may be subsequent decisions of courts or tribunals on the matter covered by this fact sheet which mean that the contents are no longer accurate.



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Falling objects

Objects have the potential to fall onto or hit people at the workplace or adjoining areas if precautions are not taken. Adjoining areas could include a public footpath, road, square or the yard of a dwelling or other building beside a workplace. Equipment, material, tools and debris that can fall or be released sideways or upwards are also considered falling objects.

Examples include:

- an object free falling from a structure, such as:
 - roof scaffolding, tools, rock, soil and bricks
 - fixtures including pictures, ceiling panels and white boards that have not been securely fixed, and
 - materials that fall from over-stacked shelving.
- an object free falling from lifting machinery, a vehicle or other plant equipment, including loads being lifted that are not well secured or are unstable
- an object or material ejected while using machinery or hand tools
- the collapse of an unstable structure including shelves, benches and mezzanine floors not strong enough to bear the weight of the objects kept on them.

The role of PCBU

PCBUs must manage the risks associated with an object falling on a person if it is reasonably likely to injure the person.

Adequate protection must be provided to minimise the risk and protect the person.

When managing risks, the risk must be eliminated, so far as is reasonably practicable. If elimination is not reasonably practicable, the risks must be minimised so far as is reasonably practicable.

This requires each relevant PCBU to provide and maintain a safe system of work including:

- fall prevention, so far as is reasonably practicable, and
- if fall prevention is not reasonably practicable—a system to arrest falling objects, so far as is reasonably practicable.

Other control measures can include:

- use of 'isolation' or 'no go' zones where there is a risk of an object falling into an area
- providing appropriate training and supervision
- use of suitable Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Administrative controls (such as safe work methods or procedures) and PPE should only be used:

- when there are no other practical control measures available (as a last resort)
- as an interim measure until a more effective way of controlling the risk can be used
- to supplement higher level control measures (as a backup).

Further information and guidance on selecting appropriate control measures is available in the Code of Practice: [How to Manage Work Health and Safety Risks](#).

Worker involvement in the risk management process

Consultation with workers and their health and safety representatives is required at each step of the risk management process. By drawing on the experience, knowledge and ideas of workers, PCBUs are more likely to identify all hazards and choose effective control measures.

Workers should be required to report any hazards and health and safety problems promptly so risks can be managed before an incident occurs.

If there is a health and safety committee for the workplace, it should be engaged in the risk management process as well.

Selecting control measures—fall prevention

Fall prevention must be considered and, so far as is reasonably practicable, implemented before considering options for arresting the fall of objects. Control measures that can assist in protecting persons from falling objects are suggested below.

Securing a load

To prevent objects from falling freely from one level to another when they are being stored a secure physical barrier should be provided. Examples of additional control measures include:

- stacking items so they cannot slide, fall or collapse when they are stored above ground level

- using netting or restraining bars to keep items in place when they are stored above ground level so they cannot fall easily if they are disturbed
- following the safe load limit of the storage system when storing items
- ensuring shelving systems, barriers and other fittings are properly secured and well maintained
- inspecting pallets each time before use to make sure they are in a safe condition
- loading pallets correctly to ensure load stability—banding, shrink or stretch wrap can help with this.

Moving a load

When moving a load, a safe means of raising and lowering plant, materials and debris should be provided. Examples of additional control measures include:

- handling equipment such as a fork-lift truck that is suitable for the job is properly inspected, maintained and operated by competent and/or qualified persons as required
- following the safe working load limits and taking into account all relevant factors such as stability of ground conditions, use of outriggers or stabilisers, slewing rate and wind conditions (if applicable)
- making sure the load is balanced and secure when the load is lifted
- enclosing areas that loads are being lifted over, and
- establishing 'isolation' or 'no-go' zones with barriers and trained workers to restrict access.

Working at a height

Examples of controls for working at heights include:

- keeping large equipment at ground level
- good housekeeping, for example keeping the work area tidy and ensuring materials, debris, tools and equipment that are not being used are out of the way
- if placing an item on a scaffold or platform, providing a secure physical barrier at the edge of the elevated area, such as toe boards or infill panels that form part of a guardrail system
- tethering or otherwise securing tools and materials to prevent them falling on people below
- keeping tools or other materials away from edges and off of railings or sills

- using chutes when placing debris into a skip below a work area.

Demolition work

Principal contractors and other PCBUs involved in demolition work must provide adequate protection to ensure objects do not fall onto or hit construction workers or other people in adjoining areas such as a public footpath, road, and the yard of a dwelling or other building.

Selecting control measures—fall arrest

When considering control measures to contain or catch falling objects, identify the types of objects that could fall, as well as the fall gradient and distance, to ensure that any protective equipment or structures are strong enough to withstand the impact forces of the falling object.

Examples of these control measures include:

- erecting a covered pedestrian walkway
- erecting a catch platform with vertical sheeting or perimeter screening
- providing overhead protection on mobile plant.

Maintaining control measures

Each relevant PCBU must ensure control measures are:

- suitable for the nature and duration of the work
- installed and used correctly
- maintained in good working order.

Reviewing control measures

Controlling health and safety risks in the workplace is an ongoing process that needs to take into account changes in the workplace. This is why procedures and risk control measures must be reviewed regularly to ensure they are still effective.

More information

More information about the risk management process is available in the Codes of Practice: [How to Manage Work Health and Safety Risks](#) and [Construction Work](#).

Codes of Practice and other resources are available on the [Safe Work Australia website](#).