Health and Safety

Construction Bulletin

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Scaffolding

Introduction

Scaffolding is a temporary means of support used by most trades in the construction industry as:

- A means of access;
- A platform to work from and/or to store or support materials; and
- A way to provide protection to persons below.

Different types of scaffolding structures include:

- Tube and clip;
- Proprietary equipment;
- Mechanical platforms raised and lowered while in use (scissors, BMUs and suspended);
- Wall brackets, and
- Timber.

Depending on its use and design, scaffolding may be standing, freestanding, hanging, suspended, mobile or special. Standard requirements (except for special scaffolds) relating to the safe erection and use of scaffolding are contained in the OSH *Approved Code of Practice for the Safe Erection and Use of Scaffolding*, which can be purchased from any OSH office. The joint Australian/New Zealand Standards AS/NZS 1576:1995 Parts 1-5 and AS/NZS 4576: 1995 also provide guidance.

In most instances, accidents and incidents involving the use of scaffolding are the result of failure to meet the preferred work practices and arrangements contained in the approved code.

Erection of Scaffolding

All scaffolding where the working platform is over 5 metres high must be erected, altered, repaired, maintained or dismantled only by a certificated scaffolder who has an appropriate certificate of competency for that class of scaffolding.

Standing, freestanding and mobile scaffolds up to 5 metres high can be erected by a competent person provided they are erected in accordance with the code. The 5 metre height relates to the topmost working platform of the scaffold.

Special scaffolds differ from the standard requirements for standing and suspended scaffolds. All special scaffolds must be designed in accordance with sound engineering practice, and must be erected, altered, repaired, maintained or dismantled in accordance with the manufacturer's instruction or engineer's design requirements, where erected over 5 metres. A certificated scaffolder who has an appropriate certificate of competency in the type of scaffolding being used must be engaged. A health and safety inspector may require a registered engineer's certificate, certifying the adequacy of the design.

Accidents Involving Use of Scaffolding

Because of their wide use in industry, many accidents occur involving the use of scaffolding. Injuries sustained can be minor, serious or fatal.

Accident examples include:

- Falls, where workers climb the scaffold structure. This can be prevented by the provision of internal ladder access to all working platform levels.
- Falls from working platforms where those platforms were not decked for their required width and length.
- Falls from working platforms due to inadequate or insufficient guardrails to the exterior elevation and ends of working platforms, and in instances where a fall condition exists from platforms at the inside elevation of a scaffold.
- Falls while working above or standing on the guardrails.
- Falls while working from ladders resting on working platforms. Work must be carried out from the working platform, not from ladders or any other item positioned on it in an attempt to gain additional working height.
- Falls while working from suspended scaffolds or elevated work platforms where workers are not wearing full safety harnesses securely anchored (the use of safety belts and/or seat harnesses are no longer recommended to arrest a person in the event of a fall).
- Overloading scaffolds resulting in structural failure or collapse.
- Scaffolds falling over because they were not correctly attached to the structure being worked on. This also applies to mobile scaffolds even where the height to minimum base dimension ratio of 3:1 exists, as wind and other factors can, and do, result in scaffolds falling over.

Notifiable Work and Scaffold Registers

The erecting or dismantling of scaffolding from which any person may fall 5 metres or more is notifiable work and is required to be notified to OSH at least 24 hours before that work commences. Your local OSH office has the appropriate notification forms.

Similarly, the use of scaffolding is also notifiable work where a risk arises that any person may fall 5 metres or more.

Scaffold registers or a scaffold management system, must be kept on site and used and be available for inspection, for all scaffolding from which a person could fall 5 metres or more. These registers contain the inspections carried out on such scaffolds prior to initial use, and at subsequent regular intervals. Sample registers and the details to be recorded are contained in the code.

Scaffold inspections must be carried out by a certificated scaffolder of the appropriate class, or a competent person such as a registered engineer, or a person who has sufficient training and experience to determine that the scaffold complies.