

Safety and health alert

12/00 Fall from height on residential construction site

Incident

A building labourer was assisting a carpenter to fix timber roof trusses on a single storey house in Broome during October 1999. The labourer was standing on the bottom truss members and pushing against the gable end truss when he fell 3.6 metres to the ground.

During the fall his head contacted the corner of a brick wall located below the work area. The labourer died several days later as a result of injuries received in the fall.

Factors

1. Falls onto sharp or uneven surfaces or objects can result in local impact or puncture injuries with far greater severity than flat impact wounds.
2. The wall below the work area was not identified as a particular hazard before work commenced on site. The roofing work was considered to be typical and without unusual hazards.
3. The possible severity resulting from a fall through the roof structure and onto the wall was not considered.
4. Although scaffolding and scaffold planks were available on site, they were not used as a working platform for the labourer at the time of the accident.

Recommendations

1. Risks from falls should be controlled using the hazard identification, risk assessment and risk control approach described in the Western Australian Code of Practice - Prevention of Falls at Workplaces.
2. Site-specific hazards such as materials, debris or building structure in the potential fall area should be included in the risk assessment.
3. Particular consideration should be given to controlling fall-through risks, especially where truss or rafter spacings exceed 900 mm.
4. Contractors must seriously consider why work cannot be carried out from a safe working platform. This could include - scaffold, elevated work platform, purpose built platform or decking out.

Further Information

Further information can be obtained from the WorkSafe internet site www.worksafe.wa.gov.au, or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email: safety@docep.wa.gov.au.

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