

# Safety and health alert

## 17/00 Truck unloading fatality

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### Incident

A 37 year-old construction supervisor was killed when steel wall frames fell from a trailer in April 2000 at Karratha. The wall frames were going to be manually unloaded from the trailer at a construction site. The truck driver had removed webbing straps and lowered the trailer side gates before the accident occurred.

The supervisor was standing next to the trailer when thirteen frames, weighing approximately 750 kg, fell off the trailer after steel bands securing the frames were cut. The supervisor was unable to get away in time from the falling frames after the truck driver shouted a warning.

### Factors

1. The wall frames were intended to be unloaded manually, with one person standing on the trailer and the other two workers standing on the ground next to the trailer.
2. The wall frames were loaded upright. The frames were 2.8 metres high and 6 metres long, and the base section was only 60 mm wide.
3. The trailer was parked on uneven ground, causing the trailer bed to angle down at both front and side of unloading.
4. As a result of the narrow base of the wall frames, they became unstable when all straps and steel bands were removed.

### Recommendations

1. The method and sequence of loading must allow for safe unloading. Loads should be evenly distributed, and secured or arranged so they do not slide or fall off the vehicle during driving of the vehicle or the unloading.
2. Where loads of a particular type are carried regularly, or become unstable whilst being made ready to unload, it may be practicable to provide racking to aid the load stability.
3. Mechanical handling equipment such as cranes and forklifts should be used to load/unload vehicles where practicable. A simple rule is :- **"if it is loaded mechanically then it should be unloaded mechanically"**.
4. Loading/unloading should never be carried out on gradients steep enough to make the operation unsafe. Vehicles should be positioned on firm ground which is free from pot-holes or debris.
5. Unstable loads should be restrained from falling or moving at all times, including loading/unloading and movement/transit of the vehicle.

### Further Information

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

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