

Safety and health alert

15/02 Collapse of operable (folding) wall

Incident

A female employee suffered serious and life-threatening injuries when the panels of an Operable Wall left the tracking system and collapsed on top of her. At the time, two employees were attempting to move the panels to close the Operable Wall (sometimes called a concertina wall).

There are various brands of Operable Walls available in Australia. Operable Walls are widely used to divide/partition rooms (eg. to turn one large area into smaller ones), and are found in workplaces including offices, training facilities, schools, halls, community facilities etc. In order to open or close an Operable Wall, the panels are moved along a track system attached to the ceiling or roof. Some Operable Walls have an access door to enable people to move from part of the divided room to the other when the wall is closed.

Factors

1. The Operable Wall panels had previously not moved freely on the tracking system - this difficulty was not reported to the employer, and no maintenance request was lodged with the supplier or manufacturer.
2. The section of the tracking system that failed was secured differently at its ends than the other sections.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. All Operable Walls be checked as soon as possible to ascertain if the panels move freely on the tracking system, and a maintenance request lodged with the manufacturer or supplier if the panels do not move freely.
2. That Operable Walls are installed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, and in accordance with recommendations from the building designers/architects.
3. Manufacturer's operating instructions to be readily available and steps taken to ensure they are complied with.
4. Instruction and training be provided to persons using Operable Walls to ensure the safe operation of the system is known and carried out.
5. That the tracking system be checked to ensure it is totally secured in accordance with the manufacturer's/supplier's recommendations.



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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