

# BASIC STEPS TO PREVENTING FALLS FROM HEIGHTS

1ST EDITION

JUNE 2005

The following information is provided for people or organisations that have responsibilities under the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act 2004 for ensuring a safe and healthy environment. This guidance is intended to illustrate some measures that can be taken to reduce the likelihood of injuries from falls, both above and below two metres. You should also check the Occupational Health and Safety (Prevention of Falls) Regulations 2003 and the OHS Act to determine the legal requirements that relate to your specific situation.

## STEP 1 – DETERMINE WHAT RESPONSIBILITIES EVERYONE HAS FOR MANAGING FALL PREVENTION AT THE WORKPLACE

Everyone at the workplace is responsible for health and safety including managing the prevention of falls. Specific responsibilities differ, however, depending on the job, the site, the specific task(s) required, who is in control of the site or the job and whether the person has duties as an occupier, an employer or an employee or an erector or installer of plant. Designers, manufacturers, importers and suppliers of equipment used in workplaces also have responsibilities regarding fall prevention.

For each job it needs to be decided who has specific responsibilities for particular tasks so a safe work environment can be maintained at all times. This requirement includes responsibilities for ensuring adequate fall prevention is in place, any equipment is used correctly, safety measures are maintained and workers are given adequate instruction and training.

Under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 **employers** are responsible for ensuring a safe work environment that includes prevention of falls.

**Persons who manage or control workplaces** must ensure so far as is reasonably practicable that the workplace and the means of entering and leaving it are safe and without risks to health. **Manufacturers, importers and suppliers of equipment** must ensure

any equipment for use at a workplace is designed, constructed and tested so it's safe to use when used for the purpose it was designed, manufactured or supplied. Such duty holders must also ensure adequate information is available about the equipment and any conditions necessary to ensure safe use.

**Anyone who erects or installs plant** for use at a workplace must ensure it is erected or installed so when used properly it can be used safely. Under the Occupational Health and Safety (Prevention of Falls) Regulations 2003, **employees** are responsible for carrying out work according to information, instruction and training provided by an employer, and for using any safety precautions that are put in place. With all these responsibilities there will be times when duty holders other than employers will also have specific responsibilities to ensure fall prevention measures are put in place, used correctly as intended and maintained. This is the case particularly where workers are working alone or are supervising staff such as apprentices and trainees.

For more information on management of tasks involving fall prevention, refer to the WorkSafe Victoria information sheet Prevention of Falls – Contractor Management.

# BASIC STEPS TO PREVENTING FALLS FROM HEIGHTS

## STEP 2 – IDENTIFY ALL FALL HAZARDS



1.0 Highly risky practices for accessing and working on a roof.

To comply with the OHS Prevention of Falls Regulations 2003, employers must identify all tasks that involve the possibility of someone falling more than two metres. Tasks may include:

- construction, demolition, repairs or maintenance on any plant or structure;
- work on fragile or unstable surfaces;
- the need for equipment to gain access;
- work on sloping or slippery surfaces; and
- work near an edge, hole, pit or shaft.

To assist with identifying the above tasks employers must also keep up to date with the state of knowledge about fall hazards. This will generally mean checking for and obtaining information regarding fall prevention from WorkSafe Victoria and keeping up to date with current industry knowledge, as well as reading any information supplied by suppliers and manufacturers on fall prevention issues and equipment.

By law so far as is reasonably practicable, employers and any relevant OHS representatives must be consulted as part of the identification process. Workers are usually aware of such tasks and therefore should be able to assist.

## STEP 3 – ASSESS RISKS AND SITUATIONS WHERE SOMEONE MAY FALL FROM HEIGHT

For each task identified above, duty holders need to determine whether there is a risk of a fall from height and consider the circumstances that may increase the risk of a fall. To comply with legislative requirements, an assessment must involve looking at how work is done, how often, the conditions or physical surroundings where such work is undertaken and consulting relevant OHS representatives. Things that should be considered include:

- The nature, size and layout of the workplace.
- The duration, extent and type of work to be undertaken. (*Example: is just a visual check required or is installation/repair needed? How long will the job take?*)
- What height will workers be required to access or undertake work?
- Training and experience of employees undertaking the work. (*Example: are trainees or apprentices involved?*)
- How to get to the work area. (Consider terrain, travel distance, ease of access for equipment.)
- The number and movement of people and plant on the work site. (*Example: are workers or forklifts nearby that could interfere with fall prevention measures? Do their movements cross paths with one another increasing the likelihood of a fall?*)
- Conditions of work. (*Example: Is it windy or slippery? Is there poor lighting, sloping surfaces or other hazards above or below work area such as power lines, impaling hazards or trees?*)

If an assessment shows a risk of a fall from height, or if the work is to be conducted at a height of more than two metres, then by law precautions need to be put in place to stop someone falling. If it's not reasonably practicable to take measures to eliminate the risk of a fall from height, then precautions are needed to reduce the likelihood of a fall and/or the person being injured.

# BASIC STEPS TO PREVENTING FALLS FROM HEIGHTS

## STEP 4 – WHAT SAFETY MEASURES ARE NEEDED TO PREVENT A FALL OR MINIMISE THE RISK?

Where the fall height is greater than two metres, the OHS (Prevention of Falls) Regulations 2003 refer to an order for considering and implementing measures (commonly known as a hierarchy of control). The hierarchy requires a duty holder to minimise risk as far as is reasonably practicable by reference to the highest order control measure that is reasonably practicable. Relevant OHS representatives and employees must be consulted when considering what measures to use. This is a legal requirement. Refer to table below for the order to be followed.

Where there is the potential for someone to fall two metres or less, the above hierarchy is not a legal requirement; however, it is a useful guide to control the risks associated with such work. The Victorian Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 requires a safe work environment be provided without risks to health. This includes preventing falls two metres or less.

### ORDER FOR CONSIDERING WHAT SAFETY MEASURES TO USE

- 1. Can the work or some of the work be done from the ground or a solid construction?**
- 2. Can a passive fall prevention device be used?**  
(Note: a passive fall prevention device is material or equipment or a combination thereof that is designed for preventing falls and, after initial installation, does not require any ongoing adjustment, alteration or operation by any person to ensure the device's integrity.) (Example: *elevated work platforms – fixed work platforms, cherry pickers, step platforms, building maintenance units; scaffolding; guard railing; safety mesh; special forklifts such as order picking forklifts, purlin trolleys, etc.*)
- 3. Can a work positioning system be used?**  
E.g. industrial rope access system or travel restraint system.
- 4. Can a fall injury prevention system be used?**  
E.g. safety net, catch platform or fall arrest harness system.
- 5. If none of the above measures are reasonably practicable or do not minimise the risk of a fall then a fixed or portable ladder or administrative control must be used.**

In many cases a number of measures will be required to eliminate or reduce the risk of a fall.

(Refer to page 5 for illustrated examples of fall prevention measures.)

## STEP 5 – IMPLEMENT FALL PREVENTION MEASURES

Where it is determined there is a risk of a person falling from height a duty holder must implement measures that control the risk as far as is reasonably practicable. This requirement includes providing adequate instruction, information and training to staff. (Note: if using an administrative control then a record must be kept in relation to the task to which it applies.) Ensure relevant OHS representatives are also consulted at this stage. These actions are required by law.

## STEP 6 – ENSURE EMERGENCY PROCEDURES ARE IN PLACE IN CASE OF A FALL

The OHS (Prevention of Falls) Regulations 2003 require emergency procedures to be in place where physical fall prevention devices are being used. The procedures must enable the rescue of an employee in the event of a fall and ensure first aid is provided to an employee that has fallen as soon as possible after the emergency situation arises.

## STEPS 7 & 8 – ENSURE PLANT AND PREVENTION MEASURES ARE ADEQUATE AND MAINTAINED

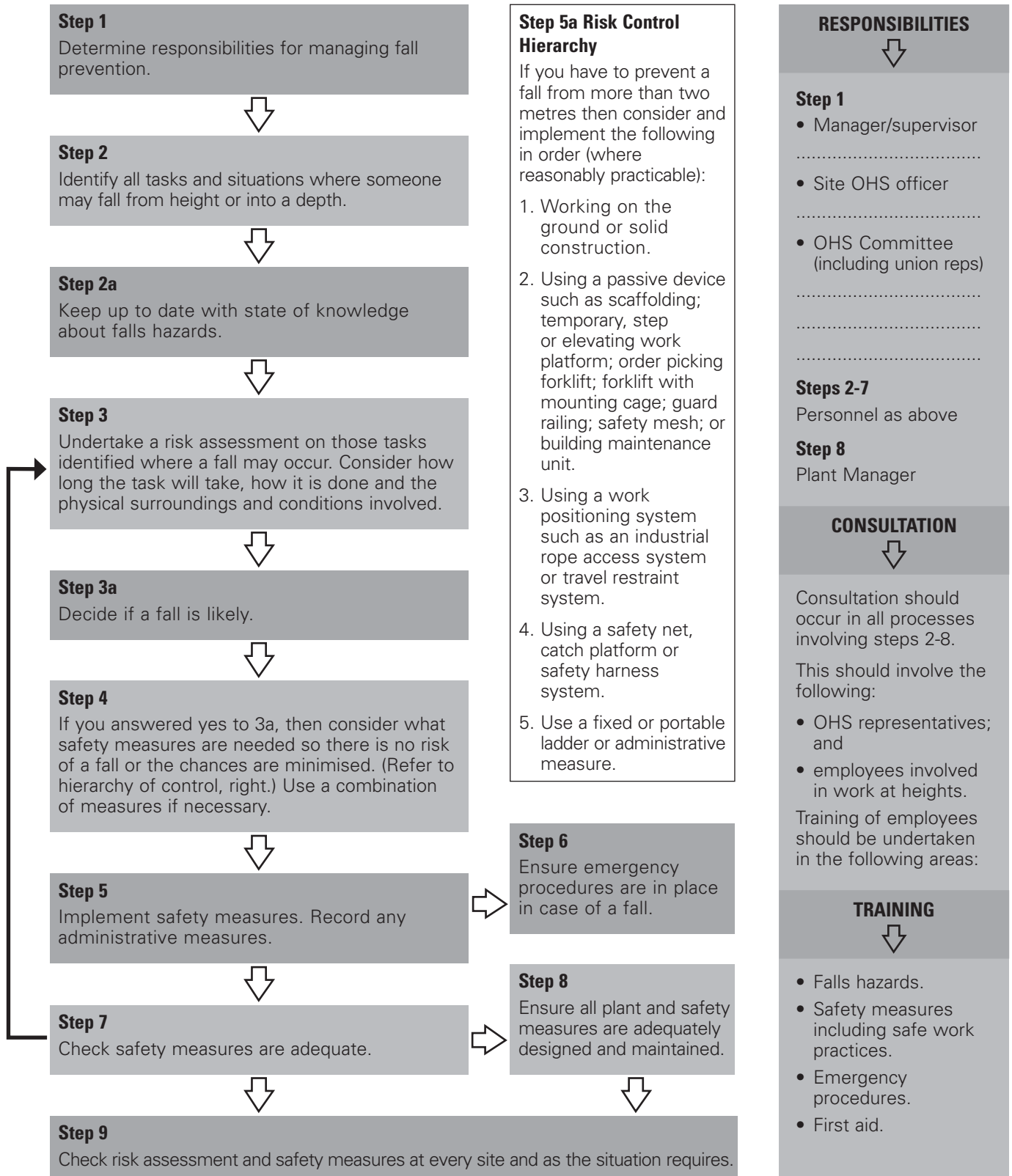
Ensure any plant being used is designed and constructed for the task at hand and that it can be used safely. Ensure fall prevention devices used by workers are properly maintained and used as prescribed. The actions just described are required by law. (Emergency Services workers are excluded in certain situations from these requirements where they are not reasonably practicable given the situation – refer to the WorkSafe Victoria information sheet 'Prevention of Falls – Emergency Services').

## STEP 9 – CHECK RISK ASSESSMENTS AND SAFETY MEASURES AT EVERY SITE AND AS THE SITUATION REQUIRES

Conditions, equipment, tasks and personnel can change from site to site and while a task is being undertaken. It is important to ensure work can be undertaken safely at all times. Checking assessments and safety measures at each site and as situations or conditions change assists in ensuring a safe work environment.

# BASIC STEPS TO PREVENTING FALLS FROM HEIGHTS

## RISK MANAGEMENT – WORKING AT HEIGHTS



# BASIC STEPS TO PREVENTING FALLS FROM HEIGHTS

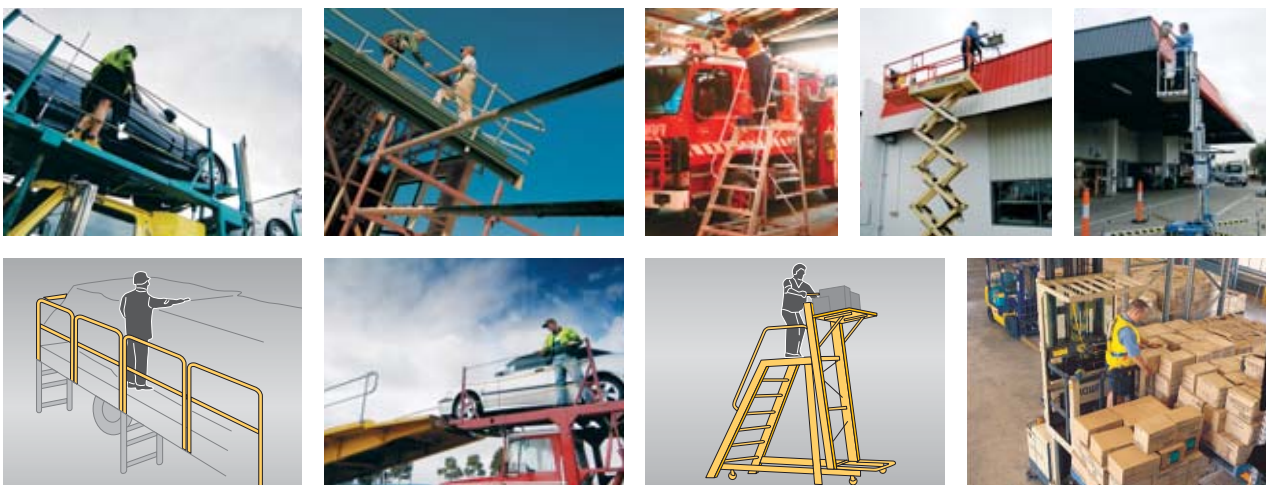
## EXAMPLES OF SAFETY MEASURES USED FOR WORKING AT HEIGHT

(from most preferred controls to least preferred controls)

### 1 – WORKING ON THE GROUND OR ON SOLID CONSTRUCTION



### 2 – PASSIVE FALL PREVENTION DEVICES



### 3 – WORK POSITIONING SYSTEMS



### 4 – FALL INJURY PREVENTION SYSTEMS



### 5 – FIXED OR PORTABLE LADDERS AND DOCUMENTED ADMINISTRATIVE MEASURES



# BASIC STEPS TO PREVENTING FALLS FROM HEIGHTS

---

## MORE INFORMATION

### WorkSafe Victoria

Specific information on working at heights can be obtained by contacting WorkSafe on 1800 136 089.

### Acts and Regulations

Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004

Occupational Health and Safety (Prevention of Falls) Regulations 2003

Occupational Health and Safety (Plant) Regulations 1995

Acts and regulations are available from Information Victoria on 1300 366 356 or online at [www.dms.dpc.vic.gov.au](http://www.dms.dpc.vic.gov.au).

### Codes of Practice and Publications

Prevention of Falls in General Construction (Code of Practice No. 28, 2004)

Prevention of Falls in Housing Construction (Code of Practice No. 29, 2004)

Guide to Manual Order Picking

Forklift Safety

These Codes and other falls prevention information are available from WorkSafe at [www.workcover.vic.gov.au](http://www.workcover.vic.gov.au).

### Australian Standards

Standards Australia has some useful information on ladders and fall protection devices available from [www.standards.com.au](http://www.standards.com.au).

### Other tools that may assist with fall prevention

- Job analysis sheets
- Visual observations of work process
- Industry publications and forums
- Professional Associations
- Suppliers and suppliers magazines
- Manufacturer's instructions
- Consultation with Emergency Services on emergency procedures required

### Acknowledgements

Thank you to the staff and stakeholders who contributed to the development of this material.

---

## WORKSAFE VICTORIA

### Advisory Service

222 Exhibition Street  
Melbourne 3000

Phone . . . . . 03 9641 1444  
Toll-free . . . . . 1800 136 089

Email . . . . . [info@workcover.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@workcover.vic.gov.au)  
Web . . . . . [www.workcover.vic.gov.au](http://www.workcover.vic.gov.au)

The information contained in this guide is protected by copyright. The Victorian WorkCover Authority hereby grants a non-exclusive licence to the recipient of this guidance material on the condition that it is not disseminated for profit. The Victorian WorkCover Authority encourages the free transfer, copying and printing of the information in this guidance material if such activities support the purpose for which this guidance material was intended.

WorkSafe Victoria is a division of the Victorian WorkCover Authority.

WWA955/01/06.05