

Employee fatally injured after fall from steel stillage

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An alert about hazards and risk controls associated with working at heights and forklifts, following the death of an employee.

Background

A male worker has died after falling from a steel stillage that had been raised on the tines of a forklift. The worker was oxy-cutting steel beams that run across the inside roof line of a warehouse. During this process, the stillage became unstable and fell from the raised tines of the forklift, landing on the concrete surface approximately 4.5 metres below.

WorkSafe is currently investigating this incident.

Safety issues

The improper use of work platforms is a common cause of serious incidents, including falls.

Employers have a duty to provide and maintain, so far as is reasonably practicable, a working environment that is safe and without risks to health. This includes eliminating or controlling risks of falling.

In addition to falls, there are considerable risks when safe systems of work aren't in place for tasks involving the use of plant, including forklift work platforms.

Recommended ways to control risks

Where there is a risk of falling more than two metres, employers must eliminate any risk of falls so far as is reasonably practicable. For example, by requiring work be done on the ground or on a solid construction.

If the risk of falling cannot be eliminated, employers must reduce any remaining risk as far as is reasonably practicable by implementing the below controls in the following order:

1. passive fall prevention device such as scaffolds
2. work positioning systems such as ropes, travel restraints
3. fall arrest systems such as catch platforms, safety nets, and safety harnesses
4. fixed or portable ladders or administrative controls

Where forklift work platforms are used, employers should ensure:

- using elevated work platforms, such as scissor lifts and boom lifts
- only appropriate "fit for purpose" forklift attachments are selected for the task, and used in accordance with instructions
- work platforms and designated forklifts comply with Australian Standards
- employees are provided with instruction information and training on the capacity of the forklift and any attachments and are supervised when necessary
- safe work procedures are developed, including emergency response and rescue, if an incident or breakdown occurs

- work platforms/man cages with a meshed in work area are securely attached to the tines when employees are performing tasks
- persons remain within the forklift platform when it is raised
- forklift operators hold valid licenses
- forklift traffic management plans separate pedestrians and mobile powered plants

Employers are reminded that where construction work involves a risk of a person falling more than two metres, this is defined as high risk construction work (HRCW). It is a requirement that you prepare and follow a safe work method statement for HRCW.

Legal duties

Under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (OHS Act), employers must, so far as reasonably practicable, provide and maintain a working environment that is safe and without risks to the health of employees. This includes identifying risks to health or safety and eliminating or reducing those risks, so far as is reasonably practicable.

Employers must, as far as is reasonably practicable, provide or maintain plant or systems of work that are safe and without risks to health.