

Scaffold Safety toolbox talk

A simple, 5 minute outline of what to cover in a toolbox talk on Scaffold Safety.

Falls from heights is one of the biggest killers on construction sites, most of which occur from a height of less than 4 metres. Scaffolding causes many of these incidents, largely due to workers becoming complacent to Scaffolding Safety procedures. It is critical that scaffolding is erected by appropriate persons, that it is regularly inspected and maintained, and that users are aware of the associated risks. Everyone on site has a duty to keep themselves and others safe.

Why run this toolbox:

- Prevent workplace accidents involving scaffolding
- Fewer accidents mean higher productivity
- Improve understanding of legislation and standards

Scaffolding risks

Some common risks around scaffolding include:

- Slips and trips on slippery/obstructed surfaces.
- Falls - either through gaps while climbing, or due to poorly constructed platforms.
- Scaffold collapse.
- Falling tools, scaffold parts and materials.
- Failure of scaffold components.
- Electrocution from overhead cables.

Scaffolding competencies (in New Zealand)

Any scaffold that is over 5 m must be erected by a person who holds a certificate of competence for that type of scaffolding (Basic, Advanced, or Suspended). Any scaffold under 5 metres must be erected by a competent person, which is defined as someone with adequate training, qualification, or experience.

Site assessment

Many factors affect the risk profile of scaffolding. Some things to consider before erecting scaffolding include ground conditions, environmental conditions, accessways, proximity to electrical cables and powerlines, and proximity to the public.

In New Zealand, work involving the erection and dismantling of scaffold where the highest platform exceeds 5 metres, must be notified to WorkSafe at least 24 hours before the work begins.

Fall protection and rescue

Fall arrest harnesses should be worn by workers on scaffolds whenever there is a risk of a fall, and anchor points must be capable of withstanding the force of the fall. It is important there is a fall rescue plan in place because fallen workers are at risk of blood pooling, which can cause loss of consciousness or death, and rescuers are also at risk of falling. All workers on site should be aware of the Fall Rescue Plan.

Scaffold use and management

In New Zealand, all scaffolds, excluding scaffolds under 2 metres, must be checked, and tagged by a competent person; before handover to a PCBU. The tag must clearly display important safety information. If a scaffold is incomplete, it must be clearly labelled as such.

It is important to perform daily pre-starts and weekly inspections. Details of the inspections must be recorded and signed. Inspections should check:

- Are all components present?
- Is the ground capable of supporting all imposed loads?
- Are couplers tightened properly?
- Are ties and braces in place and effective?
- Are working platforms free of trip hazards?
- Is there at least 450 mm clearance, passed stacked materials?

- Are any planks damaged or not properly supported?
- Are guardrails and kickboards securely in place?
- Are stairs and ladders properly secured, hatches in place, and operating correctly?
- If adjacent to public areas, is there adequate public protection, such as barricades or catch fans?

Always wear a safety helmet and appropriate safety footwear. Make sure you report any damage / scaffolding that is no longer safe; since unsafe ones should be taken out of service.

Key takeaways:

- *Always perform a risk assessment to identify site-specific hazards.*
- *Make sure scaffolding is erected by a competent person.*
- *Regularly inspect scaffolding for any damage or missing parts.*
- *Always wear appropriate PPE.*

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