

# Protecting the Public toolbox talk

A simple, 5 minute outline of what to cover in a toolbox talk on Protecting the Public.

Employers have a duty under the Health and Safety at Work Act to protect their workers, other workers, and anyone else, including the public, from any harm that could arise from work and/or worksites under their control. This toolbox talk identifies various hazards that are particularly relevant for the public and discusses strategies to mitigate risk.

## Why run this toolbox:

- Raise awareness for workers about hazards that pose a risk to the public.
- Learn practicable measures you can take to protect the public.
- Assist with understanding of legal requirements

## Access to hazardous sites:

Worksites can be very hazardous environments. There is often heavy machinery, moving plant, dangerous goods, and people that are focussed on their work. It is critical to prevent members of the public from entering these hazardous sites. The best strategy to achieve this is to set a boundary around the site. Boundaries are typically high fences that cannot be climbed over easily. Fences should have appropriate warning signage that informs the public of the hazards inside. In some cases, a temporary structure of cones, barriers or plastic fencing may be suitable as a temporary solution for lower risk sites.

Access to sites should be controlled via gates that must remain closed when not in use.

## Common hazards and controls:

- Openings, such as manholes and excavations, pose a serious fall risk. Ensure all openings are isolated from public access.
- Falling objects, such as tools and building materials, can cause fatal injuries if they impact pedestrians. Ensure all items at height are secured and nets and toe boards are in place where required.
- Vehicles, such as forklifts, trucks and diggers, pose a serious risk of crush and blunt force trauma. Ensure traffic management plans are in place that effectively protect the public.
- Hazardous substances, such as paints and petrol, pose a serious health risk if inhaled or ingested. Ensure these substances are securely stored under lock and key.

### **Diversions:**

If a public access route has been blocked, it is important to establish alternative access routes. This may involve diverting pedestrians across the road or even onto the road. Make sure the diversions you create are safeguarded so that they do not put the public at undue risk, e.g. ensure barriers between pedestrians and traffic flow.

### **Interacting with the public:**

Make sure workers know how to deal with the public. Operators of machinery should stop work immediately if members of the public breach any risk zone.

### **Vulnerable people:**

There are certain groups of the public who are more vulnerable to hazards in the workplace. Children are naturally drawn to construction sites because they look like giant playgrounds. The elderly and people with disabilities are more prone to falling into openings or tripping on uneven ground. Make sure the controls you put in place are designed to protect these people.

### **Key takeaways:**

- The business and its employees must protect the public from any harm arising from their work
- Use barriers such as fencing to separate the public from any hazards.
- Be aware of any members of the public entering the worksite.
- Consider the more vulnerable members of society when establishing controls.

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