

## SAFETY BULLETIN

# 77– Working in Ceiling Spaces – Prevention of Falls

### OVERVIEW

Entering ceiling spaces for any works such as installing cables or maintenance and repairs can pose serious risks to workers. The risk of falls is one of the major risks present to workers who work on roofs and in ceiling spaces. Fragile ceiling materials can fracture quickly and without warning and workers can easily fall resulting in serious injuries.

To assist in preventing incidents and increase understanding about the fall risks associated with working in ceiling spaces, the following guidance information has been put together to explain what measures can be taken to control the risk of falls.

### WHAT ACTIONS SHOULD BE TAKEN AND RECOMMENDATIONS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED IN LIGHT OF UNDERSTANDING THE RISK?

In order to protect against falls, it is essential that before entering any ceiling space all potential hazards are identified and a risk assessment conducted. Prior to works commencing, the ceiling should first be visually inspected by a competent person from below for evidence of cracks, holes, voids, vents, or where the ceiling may be damaged due to water leaks, mould etc. Ensure any holes or openings are appropriately covered or guarded. Consultation should also occur with the building owner or occupier to determine the potential for any additional hazards that may not have been considered. Where concern exists around the structural integrity of the roof structure, entry to the ceiling space should not occur until confirmation has been sought from

a competent person that the integrity has been deemed suitable for access. All electricity should also be turned off prior to accessing the ceiling space to remove any electrical hazards.

Before commencing work in the ceiling space, complete a pre-work risk assessment of the roof cavity by looking around the ceiling space to identify hazards including those that pose a fall risk (i.e. trip hazards, poor lighting, damaged ceiling materials etc.). Brief all team members on the assessment findings and confirm all safety precautions are in place before any work commences. All workers must be suitably trained and competent to perform the task and have any necessary PPE such as appropriate footwear.

To protect against the risk of falls when carrying out work in ceiling spaces;

- ▶ Plan the work so you don't have to access non trafficable areas where possible.
- ▶ Ensure access and exit points are easily accessible and free from obstructions. Moving in and out of ceiling spaces can be difficult so it's important there are no obstacles.
- ▶ Ensure that ladders used to access the ceiling space are secure and will not slip when being used. Three points of contact need to be made at all times when using ladders.
- ▶ Reduce trips in and out of the ceiling by checking you have all the tools and materials

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for your job before you head up there. Also ensure you have a fully charged mobile phone in case you need to call for assistance.

- ▶ Secure all tools and equipment to prevent potential falling objects.
- ▶ Once in the ceiling space, inspect the area for any additional hazards and prepare the area for safe working. Clear as much space as possible/ needed to give yourself a large, safe, work area. Look out for, and avoid, any sharp edges or nails sticking out from the roof and beams.
- ▶ Take care accessing and traversing the work area, avoiding tripping over debris, material and the ceiling trusses.
- ▶ Step carefully on ceiling joists or other beams – not the ceiling material (i.e. plasterboard, gyprock sheeting etc.) – as this won't bear your weight. Also be careful not to sit or lean on ceiling material while you are working. Assume all ceiling material is fragile unless deemed otherwise by a competent person.
- ▶ For easier movement around ceiling spaces or for works that will take an extended period of time, support beams or work platforms should be used to safely move around the area (i.e. crawl boards). Consideration should be given to

the position of the crawl boards and not placed directly on the ceiling material. Crawl boards can be laid across joist to help avoid standing on any fragile material. If insulation is in place, roll it back to reveal the top of the joists and then lay the crawl boards on top. Crawl boards can be lifted and moved as you work around the ceiling space. It's recommended that you use at least two boards so you can stand on one while you move the other. When working on the boards, avoid having too much overhang on either of the end joists. If you stand close to the overhanging end of the board, it will become unstable and act like a see-saw. Also don't rest crawl boards directly on top of electricity cables or water pipes.

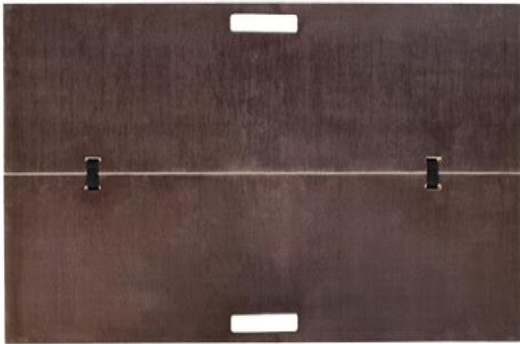
- ▶ Working in ceiling spaces can be very awkward, uncomfortable and tiring. Where works take a long time, ensure you take plenty of rest breaks and drink plenty of water.

Monitor the works as they take place to ensure risk controls remain in place and there are no changes where new hazards are introduced.

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← Crawl boards should be of suitable size and strength and adequately rated to ensure enough support is provided.

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