



HWSA FINAL REPORT

PREVENTION OF FALLS IN CONSTRUCTION 2008

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1 PROJECT OVERVIEW

This campaign was initiated by the Heads of Workplace Safety Authorities (HWSA) as falls from height continues to be a major cause of deaths and injuries within the construction industry. During 2006/07, across Australia, 13 construction workers died and more than 620 were hospitalised after falling from height.

The following workplace safety authorities joined forces to successfully mount this coordinated campaign of inspector visits to construction sites across Australia.

- ACT WorkCover
- Comcare
- NT WorkSafe
- SafeWork SA
- WorkCover NSW
- Workplace Health & Safety Queensland
- Workplace Standards Tasmania
- WorkSafe Victoria
- WorkSafe Western Australia

A total of 1,044 site inspections occurred and were distributed evenly between regional areas and the capital cities. Of the sites inspected only 35% were compliant with falls prevention requirements; on the other sites inspectors detected and had rectified a total of 1,231 instances of non-compliances.

Compared with 2004, the proportion of notices to overall compliance action was down by 24%, which corresponded to the increase in recording of the number of non-compliances rectified while the inspector was onsite.

Significantly, only 2% of inspectors consider the industry sectors have deteriorated in falls prevention since 2004. While most inspectors (75%) report a slight or obvious improvement; noticeably 80% of the obvious improvement was reported by regional inspectors and applied equally to both housing and small commercial construction.

Overall, there has been an improvement in falls prevention within the targeted sectors, especially within the multi-storey housing sector. The increased level of compliance action reflects the reported increase in the availability of fall prevention controls, not always used or maintained correctly, and the change to inspectors' expectations of what is practicable for these sectors.

The main causal factors (76%) for non-compliance with falls prevention requirements were identified, through duty-holders' responses, as the lack of knowledge of the law (23%) and the reliance on sub-contractors (53%) to manage safety.

Duty-holders also indicated they normally found out about health and safety via their employer associations (43%) or from the local OHS regulator (34%) and only 6% from the media.

1.1 Background

The Heads of Workplace Safety Authorities (HWSA) is a group comprising the General Managers (or their representatives) of the peak bodies responsible for the regulation and administration of occupational health and safety in Australia and New Zealand.

HWSA mounts trans-Tasman and national compliance campaigns, and other initiatives targeted at specific industries across all jurisdictions. These campaigns and initiatives are established with the aim of minimising health and safety risks and, where possible, identifying causal factors for non-compliance by industry.

Campaigns should be run with an intention to educate industry through a balance of information, assistance and enforcement activity.

HWSA's campaign or initiatives support the *National OHS Strategy 2002-2012*, and facilitate the development of consistent approaches to agreed Australian and New Zealand priorities.

The *National OHS Strategy 2002-2012* represents a significant attempt by all governments and the peak bodies representing both employers and workers to focus on OHS outcomes and to improve coordination and cooperation between jurisdictions. Within existing regulatory structures, the *National OHS Strategy 2002-2012* provides the framework for coordinated and collaborative programs between OHS regulators, particularly with regard to five National Priorities.

The five priorities identified by the National Strategy to achieve short-term and long-term OHS improvement and to nurture longer-term cultural change are to:

1. Reduce the impact of risks at work
2. Improve the capacity of business operators and workers to manage OHS effectively
3. Prevent occupational disease more effectively
4. Eliminate hazards at the design stage, and
5. Strengthen the capacity of government to influence OHS outcomes.

The ***Prevention of falls in construction*** was nominated by HWSA, at their December 2006 meeting, as the construction campaign for 2007/08.

This campaign is a repeat of the 2003/04 HWSA Joint Construction Compliance Project and was a recommendation of the project report; the recommendation suggested that this should be done two years after the 2004 project.

The recommendation was proposed so that the 2004 data collected could act as a baseline for comparison with future data.

1.2 Project objectives

The two main purposes of this campaign were to:

- Undertake a coordinated national compliance and enforcement campaign focusing on falls prevention in targeted sectors of the construction industry
- Compare the current level of fall prevention compliance, within the targeted construction industry sectors, with that found during the 2004 Australian and New Zealand 'Falls Prevention in Construction' campaign.

The campaign aimed to achieve its purposes through an inspector-delivered operational compliance intervention (including data collection and analysis). To be considered successful and to have achieved its purposes the campaign needed to deliver the following outcomes.

1. A coordinated national approach to specific work at height issues,
2. An indication of the current level of prevention of falls compliance in the targeted sectors of the construction industry,
3. An indication of changes in prevention of falls compliance since 2004,
4. An improvement in the level of falls prevention compliance at the sites visited as part of this campaign, and
5. An improvement in the capability of builders and sub-contractors to recognise, manage and control fall-related hazards and risks on the sites inspected.

1.3 Methodology

WorkSafe Victoria committed to coordinating this 'Falls Prevention in Construction' campaign and all jurisdictions, except New Zealand, participated.

The campaign operated under a cross-jurisdictional coordinating committee, chaired by Victoria which also provided the overall project management, administration, communications and reporting support for the campaign.

The coordinating committee met in Melbourne during September 2007; all jurisdictions except the Northern Territory were able to attend. Also at this meeting was a representative of the Australian Safety and Compensation Council (ASCC), who provided advice on campaign evaluation.

During this meeting, the committee scoped the campaign, reviewed and agreed modifications to documentation from the 2004 project, reached agreement on campaign scheduling, approximate visit targets, discussed communication and evaluation strategies.

The committee members also assumed the responsibility to progress the campaign within their jurisdictions, including:

- Consulting with and informing their local stakeholders on the compliance campaign,
- Coordinating the delivery of the communications strategy,
- Briefing local field staff on the campaign and use of the audit tool, and

- Ensuring data was processed and forward to the national coordinator.

Following this initial meeting the project team developed and distributed campaign documentation and inspection tools, including:

- A stakeholder briefing (PowerPoint presentation),
- Inspector briefing documents and PowerPoint presentation,
- A pro-forma data collection tool and standard data entry spreadsheet,
- An online inspector survey,
- A campaign information flyer, and
- A national media release.

Modifications to the 2004 data collection tool, based on learnings from 2004, were made in order to increase the reliability, validity and usability of the information collected. The campaign placed emphasis on the same construction sectors and targeted the same trades as in the 2004 project, thus ensuring the data collected was comparable. Two additional trades were included in the campaign to establish a baseline for those trades.

Interventions	Between 1 February and 31 March
Visit target	At least 900 inspections nationally
In scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work at heights 2 metres and above • Detached and semi-detached houses and domestic construction up to 3 habitable storeys • Small commercial construction sites (up to \$3 million in project value). Including residential (other than above), shops, factories, public buildings/facilities, schools, hospitals, office buildings etc • Finish and fit-out and services trades • Specific falls from height(s) issues
Out of scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work at heights less than 2 metres • Commercial construction sites of more than \$3 million project value • Civil construction sites • Engineering construction sites • Demolition or asbestos removal sites • Occupation groups not identified as “in scope” (other than anyone engaged in the permanent installation of balustrades, stairways and/or handrails) • Workplaces that are not construction sites

The second coordinating committee meeting occurred in Melbourne during June 2008; all jurisdictions except the South Australia and Comcare were able to attend. During this meeting, the committee reviewed and evaluated the visit data and came to agreement on the conclusions and report recommendations.

1.4 Results of campaign activities

The campaign findings are based on analysis of the information contained in the inspector's visit summary data sheets, completed by participating inspectors during their site inspections, and the information supplied by inspectors in an online survey.

The inspector's visit summary data sheet only focused on collecting information related to falls from heights issues, other non-compliances with health and safety laws were not recorded on this tool and will not be addressed in this report.

A total of 1,044 site inspections were undertaken during this campaign, which exceeded the target of at least 900 inspections by 144 or 16%.

A total of 1,231 instances of non-compliance with falls prevention requirements were detected by inspectors; of these non-compliances 626 were dealt with via inspectors' notices. A further 605 non-compliances were rectified during inspectors' visits without the need for a notice to be issued.

Of the notices issued, 230 or 37% were Prohibition Notices, where the risk of injury necessitated immediate cessation of the particular work activity.

Penalty Notices (on-the-spot fines) are currently used in four of the nine jurisdictions; 46 falls-related Penalty Notices were issued as a result of campaign inspections.

A significant sample of inspectors (104) from across Australia who were to be involved in the 2008 campaign, undertook a voluntary online inspector survey prior to the field interventions commencing. This survey was used to gain an understanding of inspectors' perceptions of changes, if any, within the targeted construction sectors since 2004.

Only 2% of inspectors believe that there had been deterioration in the use of fall prevention controls, while approximate 75% reported that there had been a slight or obvious improvement.

Inspectors indicated that overall the housing sector had seen the most obvious improvement since 2004. Significantly, approximately 80% of the obvious improvement was from the regional areas and related equally to improvements on both housing and small commercial construction sites.

The communications strategy implemented as part of this campaign generated good publicity and media coverage for HWSA and the campaign, including numerous articles in daily and local newspapers, as well as in the specialist construction publications.

During inspections, duty-holders were asked to identify the reason why their site became non-compliant, analysis of their responses indicates the main causal factors (76%) for non-compliance with falls prevention requirements were the duty-holders' lack of knowledge of the law (23%) and their reliance on their sub-contractors (53%).

1.5 Campaign evaluation

The Coordinating committee considers the falls prevention in construction campaign 2008 has been successful and has achieved both of its main purposes (see page 6), as the outcomes listed below have been delivered.

1. A coordinated national approach to specific working at heights issues.

This was achieved through the 1,044 site inspections undertaken by inspectors using the standard inspection tool during site visits, the use of the standard briefing documents and presentations, and the use of national and standardised media releases. See appendices 2.3, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6.

2. An indication of the current level of prevention of falls compliance in the targeted sectors of the construction industry.

This has been achieved through the analysis of the visit data recorded by inspectors during this campaign. See appendix 2.1.

3. An indication of changes in prevention of falls compliance since 2004.

This has been achieved through the comparison of the visit results of this campaign and that recorded during the 2004 project and the evaluation of the online inspector survey results. See appendices 2.1 and 2.2.

4. An improvement in the level of falls prevention compliance at the sites visited as part of this campaign.

This was achieved through the enforcement action undertaken by inspectors that ensured all sites inspected during this campaign were fully compliant at the end of the inspectors' interventions.

The 65% of the 1,044 sites inspected during the campaign, which were identified to be non-compliant with fall prevention requirements, were brought to compliance through this campaign and were left in a safer condition than when they were first inspected.

5. An improvement in the capability of builders and sub-contractors to recognise, manage and control fall-related hazards and risks on the sites inspected.

This was achieved through the compliance action undertaken, guidance material, information, advice and assistance provided to duty-holders by inspectors during their inspections of the 1,044 construction sites visited during this campaign.

1.6 Major Results/Conclusions

The number, location, building and project types as well as reasons for the inspection were all comparable with those recorded in the 2004 project. Therefore, the compliance with prevention of falls requirements observed in 2008 are comparable with that recorded in 2004. This visit data and the results from the online inspector survey should give an indication of any systemic change in the targeted sectors level of fall prevention compliance.

1. A noticeable improvement (17%) in the use and adequacy of work at heights safety documentation was observed by inspectors, with 42% of the sites inspected having adequate documentation. Unfortunately, 58% of sites were found to be deficient in their documentation.
2. Approximately 75% of inspectors are of the opinion that there has been an increase in the availability and use of fall prevention controls within the targeted sectors, especially within the housing sector, significantly only 2% of inspectors thought the sectors had deteriorated.

The survey results show approximately 80% of the obvious improvement has been in regional areas and applies evenly to both housing and small commercial construction sites.

3. Jurisdictions reported that severe weather conditions across northern Australia during the field intervention phase of the campaign in February and March impacted on the amount of construction work being undertaken. The optimum time for construction work at these northern locations is between July and October.
4. Overall the level of compliance action taken by inspectors far exceeded that recorded in 2004 with an 86% increase in all types of compliance, included a 32% increase in prohibition notices (PN), a 16% increase in improvement notices (IN), a 219% increase in penalty notices and a 362% increase in the use of verbal directions or voluntary compliance (VC/VD).

This increase in compliance action is due to a number of reasons, including:

- Changes in jurisdictions' legislation or working at height guidance, and changes in jurisdictions' compliance and enforcement strategies.
- Jurisdictions have in the intervening four years seen an increase in the use and availability of higher order falls prevention controls, therefore inspectors' expectations of what is practicable to have in place has also increased.
- Jurisdictions have also seen an increased recording, by inspectors, of work undertaken by duty-holders to rectify and make safe non-compliances while the inspector is on site, which does not require the inspector to then issue notices.
- While the inspector survey shows higher order controls are more likely to be in place on sites, the visit data appears to indicate these controls are not being used or maintained correctly.
- Inadequacies with the site's available falls prevention controls were either readily able to be rectified, while the inspector was onsite, or dealt with by notices due to the immediate risk to workers.

5. The coordination committee considered it was inappropriate to use the overall compliance figures as comparisons due to the reasons listed above in item 4.

Therefore, to better gauge changes within the targeted sectors the coordination committee considered that percentage changes in the use of the different compliance tools provides a more accurate method of comparison with the results recorded 2004.

The proportion of notices issued as part of the overall compliance action undertaken by inspectors in 2008 was down by 24%, with a 7% fall in PNs and a 17% fall in INs, which corresponds to a 24% increase in recording of VC/VDs. Breakdown of changes in the three specific industry sectors are highlighted below:

- **Single storey housing** increased by 10% on PNs, 4% on INs and 12% for VC/VD. This may indicate duty-holders have yet to adopt or use correctly the controls now in common use on multi-storey housing sites. Also inspectors have increased expectations on what is now practicable for the duty-holder to provide.
 - **Multi-storey housing** decreased by 22% on PNs, 7% on INs and increased slightly for VC/VD by 3%. This may indicate that duty-holders working on these types of sites are more aware of the falls prevention requirements, are more likely to have the appropriate controls in place, and then using and maintaining them correctly.
 - **Small commercial** increased by 13% on PNs, 3% on INs and 20% for VC/VD. This may indicate that duty-holders working on these sites are using inappropriate controls or are not using the controls correctly or maintaining them in a safe condition.
6. The communications strategy generated good publicity and media coverage, unfortunately this coverage did not result in awareness of the campaign at the site level, with only 16% of duty-holders reporting awareness of the campaign. This is a drop from the approximately 50% awareness reported in 2004.
- This may be due to the necessity to generating media coverage prior to and over the Christmas holiday period, and the rollout of the field campaign in February; also some duty-holders may have thought that admitting to knowledge of the campaign would incriminate themselves to inspectors.
7. The majority of duty-holders who responded told inspectors they found out about health and safety via their employer associations (43%) or from the OHS regulator (34%) and only 6% from the media.

Major Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the visit data and the inspector survey results, the coordination committee is of the opinion that in the four years since 2004 there has been an overall improvement in falls prevention within the targeted sectors, especially in regional areas. Multi-storey housing sector appears to have had the most overall improvement. The increased level of compliance action observed during the campaign reflects the increased use of fall prevention controls, not always used or maintained correctly, and the change in expectations of what is practicable for these sectors.

NOTE: For more detail on inspection visit information or on the inspector survey go to appendices 2.1 and 2.2.

1.7 Recommendations

1. **Height safety documentation:** That participating jurisdictions consider that while there was an increase in the use and adequacy of height safety documentation, at least 58% of sites were found to be deficient. The coordination committee recommends that Jurisdictions should continue to work on increasing the penetration and uptake of this type of tool, especially with small builders and sub-contractors.
2. **Project scheduling:** That HWSA considers the timing of the field intervention phase of construction projects so they occur between July and October; this would require planning for projects to commence in the preceding business year. This change will not only coincide with the peak construction period in northern Australia but allow the communications activities to continue and occur up to the field intervention rollout.
3. **Revisit campaign:** That HWSA initiate a re-run of this project in approximately four years time (2012) so that, amongst other things, the compliance levels and the use of falls prevention controls of the targeted construction sectors can be re-measured.
4. **Similar campaigns:** That HWSA considers the possibility of mounting a similar campaign within the general construction industry in 2010 to focus on supporting the implementing of the *National Code of Practice for Falls Prevention in General Construction*.

1.8 Acknowledgements

The Coordination Committee, for the Prevention of Falls in Construction 2008, recognises and acknowledges the efforts of numerous people within each authority, who contributed to the success of this project.

The support and assistance provided by the following people was greatly appreciated:

- The participating health and safety inspectors across Australia, who through their combined efforts conducted 1,044 workplace inspections and providing valuable feedback in relation to changes within the industry sectors.
- The staff from each authority, who provided administrative support and assistance with communications activities.
- Dr Jenny Job of the Office of the Australian Safety and Compensation Council (ASCC), who assisted with the development of evaluation criteria for the project.
- WorkSafe Victoria for coordinating and project managing the project.

1.9 Coordination Committee members

The campaign operated under a cross-jurisdictional coordinating committee, chaired by Victoria which also provided the overall project management. Those representatives from the participating jurisdictions who participated on the Coordination Committee are listed below:

Jurisdiction	Representatives
WorkSafe Victoria	Stephen Darnley (national coordinator) & Ian Moore & Gerard May
ACT WorkCover	Kieth Pratt
Comcare	Greg Pople & Frank Bendeick
NT WorkSafe	Rebecca Trimble
SafeWork SA	Kit Lee
WorkCover NSW	Melissa Chaston & John Sharpen & Robert Mayell
Workplace Health and Safety QLD	Darren Sharry & Tim Campbell
Workplace Standards TAS	Robert Millhouse
WorkSafe WA	Stan Obrecht

2 LIST OF APPENDICES

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- 2.4 Briefing materials
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