



Systemic Safety Alert Work-at-Height

Major systemic safety problems

Majority of serious/fatal fall-from-height accidents are attributed to absence of suitable and safe working platform/means of support to workers on scaffolds, and failure to provide and ensure proper use of suitable fall arresting system. Major systemic safety problems detected include: -

- failure to conduct task specific risk assessments and to formulate task specific method statements;
- absence of or unclear delineation of safety responsibilities and ineffective coordination (e.g. on provision of planks on scaffolds) among principal contractor and subcontractors;
- lack of control & monitoring of subcontractors;
- failure to implement effective proactive inspection programme; and
- inadequate hazard communication through safety instruction, training and supervision.

Accident prevention measures

RSOs should advise their employers/clients to: -

- conduct task specific risk assessments of work-at-height, and devise and implement appropriate task-specific control measures having regard to the hierarchy of hazard control, viz : safer work methods to avoid work-at-height, adoption of safe facilities (e.g. gondola) for access to external walls, provision of proper working platforms on scaffolds, with the provision/use of fall arresting system being the last resort;
- ensure clear understanding of the safety responsibilities among the principal contractor, sub-contractors, different levels of site management/supervision



personnel and workers, and in case of work-at-height on bamboo scaffolds, the delineation of responsibilities between the principal contractor and sub-contractors¹; and

- develop and implement effective proactive inspection programme on compliance checking and follow-up of the planking and other safety requirements.

RSAs should take into account these systemic safety problems and accident prevention measures in executing safety audit functions.

DISCLAIMER

This Systemic Safety Alert (“the Alert”) is issued to drawing the attention of interested parties to the relevant systemic safety problems and accident prevention measures necessary to protect people engaging in similar work activities. The material contained in the Alert constitutes general guidance only. It does not reduce, limit, or replace, any legal obligations upon any person to comply with any statutory duties under relevant legislation. Users such as Managers and Supervisors should make their own evaluation of the information contained in the Alert to determine if it can be applied to their own situations and practices. The Labour Department does NOT accept any responsibilities for any loss or damage resulting from the use of or failure to use of the information on the Alert.

¹ For detailed delineation of responsibilities between the principal contractor and sub-contractors, please refer to the “Guidelines on Planking Arrangement for Providing Working Platforms on Bamboo Scaffolds” issued by the Construction Industry Council in May 2014