



Incident updates: Serious falls from height at the Gold Coast

There have been several recent falls from height at the Gold Coast which are being investigated by Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ).

In the 11 July 2017 incident in Ashmore, a worker fell through non-structural, non-weight bearing polycarbonate sheeting (alsynite) from a roof to the floor 4m below. Fortunately he was not seriously injured. Corrugated polycarbonate sheeting is not usually of structural grade nor suitable to walk upon and it can be further weakened by ultra-violet light.

Preventing a similar incident

This incident highlights that all roofs should be treated as fragile until a competent person has confirmed they are not. No sheeted roof should be relied on to bear a person's weight. This includes the roof ridge and purlins. Roofs are likely to be fragile if they are made with:

- asbestos roofing sheets
- polycarbonate or plastic commonly used in skylights
- roof lights, particularly those in the roof plane that can be difficult to see in certain light conditions or when hidden by paint
- fibre cement sheets
- liner panels on built-up sheeted roofs
- metal sheets and fasteners where corroded
- glass, including wired glass
- chipboard or similar material where rotted
- wood slabs, slates and tiles.

Protection must be provided if there is a risk of falling through the roof and work is being done on the top of the roof. Control measures to prevent injury from work on fragile roofs are similar to methods used for roof work more generally, including using:

- an elevating work platform so workers can avoid standing on the roof itself
- barriers such as guard rails or covers that are secured and labelled with a warning
- guard rails fitted to all work and access staging or platforms
- walkways or crawl boards of a suitable size and strength
- staging on the roof surface to spread the loads
- safety mesh secured under fragile roofing or skylights. If safety mesh is used, ensure it:
 - conforms to AS/NZS 4389:2015 *Roof safety mesh*
 - is installed by a competent person in a safe manner and in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions
 - has its integrity inspected by a competent person prior to roof maintenance or removal
 - is covered by the roof cladding as soon as reasonably practicable after it has been installed
- a harness system with adequate anchorage points, along with appropriate training and supervision. Wearing harnesses creates a trip hazard, so workers must take extra care with them. Training should include how to rescue someone who falls while using a fall arrest system.

Statistics

Across all Australian industries, each day 21 workers lodge a workers' compensation claim for a falls-related injury which requires one or more weeks off work. A typical claim sees the worker off work for over six weeks.

In Queensland, each year there are about 1700 falls from height causing serious injury. The construction industry accounts for more than 20 percent of these injuries with around 400 per year. The next highest is the transport industry with around 140 drivers seriously injured each year, usually falling off trailers or out of cabins.

Prosecutions

So far in 2017, there have been two completed prosecutions in relation to falls from heights and there are another 14 matters before the court. These include four in the Maroochy District Court which are Queensland's first Category 1 charges.

The Category 1 charges follow WHSQ's investigation into the death of 62 year old roofer Whare heepa Te Amo, who was working on an industrial shed at Lake Macdonald in the Sunshine Coast Hinterland in July 2014. Just four days into the job, Mr Te Amo fell almost six metres to his death while working on the edge of a roof without protection. Two family-owned businesses and their respective directors, brothers Peter Raymond Lavin and Gary William Lavin, are now involved in criminal proceedings. If found guilty of contravening Section 19 (2) and/or s20 of the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*, the Lavins face possible fines of up to \$600,000 each and maximum jail terms of five years.