

Safety in Procurement (subcontractors)



Before the Build



Top Hat Builds, were contracted to manage the construction of a large 5 bedroom 2 storey house in a leafy suburban street adjacent to a high school and opposite a petrol station. The old structure on the land would need to be completely demolished and removed. Top Hat Builds had many contacts in the industry and this gave them a false sense of security when choosing their subcontractors.

Some of the work they outsourced to subcontractors included:

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| Scaffolding | Crane operation |
| Tiling | Traffic Management |
| Electrical work | Demolition |
| Asbestos removal | |

The excavation and demolition of the site was subcontracted to a school mate of one of the owners of Top Hat Builds, Jeff from Rock and Rumble. The tender process was waved and checks were not carried out on the status of the company, valid permits, training and licences required to complete the high risk construction work.

During the excavation works, Rock and Rumble used excavators to clear the entire site, including the removal of the old structure. There were two power poles within the site and spotters were required because excavators were operating between 6.3-4 metres of the overhead power lines. The worker operating the excavator was an apprentice and not licensed to use the machine but was being supervised by the owner of Rock and Rumble. During the removal of the roof at the front of the house, the bucket of the machine struck the overhead power lines and the worker shut down the machine after hearing a loud bang and seeing a blue flash. WorkSafe inspectors found no prepared SWMS or permit for the work and Rock and Rumble were investigated and fined \$25,000.

No one was harmed in this incident but it was a narrow escape that could have ended with a worker or member of the public critically injured. Rock and Rumble completed the work with experienced and licensed staff however the Work Safe investigation against the company had a detrimental affect on the business and it was bankrupted.

"It freaked me out! I thought I had killed someone!"
Aaron Brownn - Apprentice, Rock and Rumble.



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A similar incident occurred on the same project due to the close relationship Top Hat Builds had with an electrician and small business owner of Sparky's Biz. Once again they fast tracked the process of checking the details of the company, including vital information such as the training and experience of employees. Some of the electrical work included removing and replacing the electrical connections of the current and new structure, connecting solar panels and installing an upgraded switch board. As high risk construction work these items and the activities necessary to undertake the work should have been detailed on a SWMS but unfortunately this was overlooked because of the relationship between the two companies.

A disastrous result of overlooking a thorough tender process and not following through with safety checks meant that the work carried out by the electrician put all workers at high risk of injury. The electrician did not set up a no go zone nor de-energise the live wires on the site due to his inexperience. At the same time these works were being done as an apprentice roofer was investigating the joins of the gutter and was electrocuted. He had wrongly assumed all

wires were not live and was not aware of electrical work being performed at the same time. The apprentice fell from the roof once electrocuted. The injured apprentice spent a significant amount of time in hospital and underwent multiple surgeries due to the injuries he received. The initial decision to select a friend as a subcontractor by Top Hat Builds, without a proper tender process, has not paid off and narrowly avoided a critical incident. There are now significant delays to the project and possible reputational damage in the eyes of the client.

The consequences of not using a comprehensive tender process with a checklist of mandatory requirements about experience, training and safety could have critical impacts on the success of a project, and at the highest price, endanger the lives of workers.

When subcontracting work, prioritise the safety employees by checking a company's:

✓ Staff

✓ Training

✓ Experience

✓ Insurance

✓ Permits