

Safe Work Method Statements

How and when to prepare and use a safe work method statement (SWMS) for high-risk construction work (HRCW).

A SWMS is a document that sets out the high risk construction work (HRCW) to be carried out at a workplace, the hazards arising from these activities, and the measures to be put in place to control the risks. SWMS must be prepared before HRCW commences.

The **Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017 (OHS Regulations)** require employers and self-employed persons to prepare a SWMS before starting HRCW.

High-risk construction work involves activities:

1. where there is a risk of a person falling more than 2m
2. on or next to roadways or railways used by road or rail traffic
3. in, over or next to water or liquids where there is a risk of drowning
4. at workplaces where there is any movement of powered mobile plant
5. where there are structural alterations that require temporary support to prevent collapse
6. in an area where there are artificial extremes of temperature
7. on or near energised electrical installations or services
8. involving a trench or shaft more than 1.5m deep
9. on or near pressurised gas distribution mains or piping
10. involving demolition
11. involving a confined space
12. on or near chemical, fuel or refrigerant lines
13. involving tilt-up or precast concrete
14. on telecommunications towers
15. involving diving
16. involving removal or disturbance of asbestos
17. in an area that may have a contaminated or flammable atmosphere
18. involving the use of explosives
19. involving a tunnel

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Who must ensure a SWMS has been prepared before commencing HRCW?

Employers

The employer of the employees intending to undertake HRCW

Self-employed persons

The self-employed person if they or their engaged contractors are intending to undertake HRCW

Labour hire

The employer and host employer of the employees intending to undertake HRCW

In practice, whoever is most familiar with the HRCW activity to be performed, should be involved with developing the SWMS, including affected employees and their HSRs.

SWMS duties

- **Duty holders (employers and self employed persons) must ensure that HRCW is performed in line with the SWMS.**
- **If the SWMS is not complied with the HRCW must stop immediately, or as soon as it is safe to do so. HRCW cannot resume until it complies with a SWMS or the SWMS is reviewed and, if necessary, revised.**
- **The duty holder, in consultation with the affected employees and their health and safety representatives (HSRs), must review and revise the SWMS whenever the HRCW changes or there is an indication that risks are not adequately controlled.**
- **The duty holder must retain a copy of the SWMS for the duration of the HRCW.**

The SWMS should be available at the location of the HRCW, where it can be readily referenced by affected persons or reviewed and revised as necessary. Copies can be kept in electronic format.

How to prepare a SWMS

1. **Bring together the relevant employees, their HSRs and supervisors at the location of the proposed works, if possible.**
2. **Review the proposed works and consider any site-specific factors that could impact the works.**
3. **Ensure all proposed HRCW activities are identified and hazards and risks listed.**
4. **Select the risk control measures and describe them alongside each of the hazards and risks that are listed.**
5. **Assess, review and update the SWMS if anything changes on-site, for example: weather or scope of work. Hand written amendments can be made on site.**

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Selecting risk control measures for HRCW

To control the hazards of HRCW, employers must use the **hierarchy of control** to:

1. eliminate the risks, so far as reasonably practicable
2. reduce remaining risks through
 - substitution, for example, reduce risks of crushing hazards by using mobile scaffold instead of elevated work platform
 - isolation, for example, install concrete barriers to isolate employees from vehicles
 - engineering controls, for example, bench, batter or shore the sides of excavations
3. if risk still remains, apply administrative controls, for example, install warning signs
4. if risk still remains, provide personal protective equipment (PPE)

Implementing these controls does not reduce the requirement to implement mandated controls specified by law (e.g. the OHS Regulations 2017).

Example:

A contractor is restoring a building façade. There is a risk of persons falling more than 2m (HRCW) while doing this work, so a SWMS is required. The contractor consults with employees when developing the SWMS.

They identify:

- some work can be done from the ground using a paint scraper and roller poles, partially eliminating the risk of a fall
- where poles can't be used, scaffolding will be used instead of ladders, further reducing the risk of a fall
- a risk remains that persons could fall more than 2m if the scaffold is misused. They reduce the risk further by using administrative controls such as training employees, posting warning signs and ensuring employees are supervised appropriately.

Can a SWMS address matters other than HRCW?

Only hazards and risks that are directly related to HRCW activities need be included in a SWMS. However, if it is helpful to document non-HRCW work, such as risk controls for operating plant, then include them in the SWMS.

Example:

Employees are installing a roof and there is a risk of persons falling more than 2m. As this is HRCW, it must be addressed in a SWMS. There are also other hazards and risks including the risk of employees below being struck by falling objects. These must still be managed, however, the risk of falling objects does not need to be in the SWMS because they are not part of the 19 activities of HRCW.

What is a 'generic SWMS' and are they acceptable?

A "generic SWMS" is a pre-prepared SWMS which seeks to address a range of hazards related to specific HRCW activities. For a generic SWMS to be acceptable, duty holders need to review it on-site and include all HRCW and risks associated with the activity before works commence.

Further guidance on SWMS

WorkSafe publications:

- Working safely in general construction
- Working safely in housing construction
- Controlling OHS hazards and risks
- OHS Act and Regulations

WorkSafe Advisory Service

Phone: 1800 136 089

Email: info@worksafe.vic.gov.au

Web: worksafe.vic.gov.au

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What should be included in a SWMS

You should describe or name all of the following::

- the HRCW relevant to the SWMS being prepared – check all of the applicable HRCW activities listed on page 4
- the specific task/activity being undertaken, example: roof framing
- the hazard that has the potential to cause harm, example: where there is a risk of a person falling more than 2m or involving a trench or shaft more than 1.5m deep (see list of 19 HRCW activities on page 1)
- the controls to stop the harm from occurring, example: guard rails, scaffold, or catch platforms*
- who is responsible for implementing the controls, example: foreman.

*Refer to the hierarchy of control and Regulation 44 for the Falls hierarchy of control.

What may not be included

- References to other documents, such as Australian or Industry standards, as these may be subject to change and may not be easily obtained by employees.
- Risk matrix, risk scores are not legally required.



Appendix A – Sample safe work method statement (SWMS) template for high-risk construction work (HRCW)



DUTIES: 1) A SWMS must be prepared if proposed works involve any of the HRCW activities listed below and that work poses a risk to the health and safety of any person. **2)** Affected employees and their HSRs must be consulted in the preparation of the SWMS. **3)** Once a SWMS has been developed and implemented, the HRCW to which it relates must be performed in accordance with the SWMS. **4)** Duty holders (builder and sub-contractor) must stop the HRCW immediately or as soon as it is safe to do so if the SWMS is not being complied with. The HRCW must not resume until the SWMS is complied with or reviewed and revised as necessary. **5)** The SWMS must be reviewed and if necessary, revised whenever the HRCW changes, or after any incident that occurs during HRCW, or if there is any indication that risk control measures are not adequately controlling the risks. **6)** An employer must retain a copy of the SWMS for the duration of the HRCW.

Direct employer:		Direct employer's company name:		Date SWMS provided to PC:	
Principal contractor (PC):		Work supervisor:		Site location/address:	
Email:	Ph:	Email:	Ph:	Work activity:	

High-risk construction work:

<input type="checkbox"/> There is a risk of a person falling more than 2m	<input type="checkbox"/> Work is on or adjacent to roadways or railways used by road or rail traffic	<input type="checkbox"/> Work is in, over or adjacent to water or other liquids where there is a risk of drowning
<input type="checkbox"/> There is movement of powered mobile plant	<input type="checkbox"/> There are structural alterations that require temporary support to prevent collapse	<input type="checkbox"/> Work is in an area where there are artificial extremes of temperature
<input type="checkbox"/> Work is on or near energised electrical installations or services	<input type="checkbox"/> Work involves a trench or shaft if the excavated depth is more than 1.5m	<input type="checkbox"/> Work is on or near pressurised gas distribution mains or piping
<input type="checkbox"/> Work involving demolition	<input type="checkbox"/> Work involves a confined space	<input type="checkbox"/> Work is on or near chemical, fuel or refrigerant lines
<input type="checkbox"/> Work involves tilt-up or precast concrete	<input type="checkbox"/> Work on telecommunication towers	<input type="checkbox"/> Work involving diving
<input type="checkbox"/> Work involves removal or likely disturbance of asbestos (Note: preparation of an asbestos control plan is taken to be preparation of a SWMS)	<input type="checkbox"/> Work is in an area that may have a contaminated or flammable atmosphere	<input type="checkbox"/> Work involving the use of explosives
		<input type="checkbox"/> Work involving a tunnel

Person responsible for ensuring compliance with SWMS:	Date SWMS received:
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What measures are in place to ensure compliance with the SWMS?
(for example direct supervision, regular spot checks)

How will the SWMS control measures be reviewed?	Review date:	Reviewer's signature:
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Selecting risk controls



1. Any risk to health and safety must be eliminated if it is reasonably practicable to do so.

2. Any remaining risk must be reduced, so far as is reasonably practicable, by:

- Implementing any mandated controls specified by law (e.g. the OHS Regulations 2017)
- Substituting a new activity, procedure, plant, process or substance (e.g. scaffold in preference to ladders)
- Isolating persons from the hazard (e.g. fence off areas for mobile plant operation)
- Using engineering controls (e.g. guard rails, trench shields).

More Effective



3. If any risk to health or safety remains, it must be reduced by using:

- Administration controls (e.g. activity specific safety training, work instructions, warning signs)
- PPE such as respiratory protection, hardhats, high-visibility clothing.

Less Effective

What are the tasks involved?	What are the hazards and risks?	What are the risk control measures?		
List the HRCW work tasks	List the hazards and risks of the task	List the risk control measures	List how the control measures will be implemented	List who is responsible for the control measure being implemented
EXAMPLE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roof tiling 	EXAMPLE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slipping or falling from the roof 	EXAMPLE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scaffold with catch platform and or guard rail system • Fall restraint system such as harness and appropriate anchor point 	EXAMPLE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scaffold or guard rail supplied and erected by supplier or competent person • Fall restraint system installed and used by appropriately trained persons 	EXAMPLE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principal contractor/builder • Roofer/roofing supervisor



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Less Effective

Anyone who is involved in the HRCW should sign this SWMS after they have:

- been consulted in the development, or content, of the SWMS
- read and completed the SWMS
- understand the hazards that have been identified and the controls in place
- know what they must do to safely complete the HRCW tasks

Name of worker	Signature	Date

