Demolition

This document provides employers, the self-employed and employees with information about WorkSafe’s current safety focus in the construction industry and directs them to detailed guidance about demolition.

We’re focusing on demolition
WorkSafe Inspectors are currently visiting construction sites to ensure that demolition works are planned and being undertaken safely by controlled methods or procedures.

Why the visits?
Construction work involving the demolition of a building or structure is “high risk construction work” (HRCW), and many tasks in the demolition process can involve multiple other HRCW activities. Unsafe demolition can put workers or the public at risk of death or injury, including from;

• Exposure to asbestos and hazardous substances
• Crushing or engulfment from structural collapse
• Falls from height and being hit by falling objects
• Electrocutation or electric shock
• Gas leaks or explosions
• Exposure to sewerage or other contaminates
• Breathing in dust, silica and mineral fibres.

Common demolition safety issues
WorkSafe Inspectors routinely find and take enforcement action over unsafe demolition, including but not limited to:

• Not ensuring or verifying asbestos is identified and removed prior to demolition commencing;
• Missing or inadequate public protection
• Not ensuring the structure’s stability during all phases of the demolition process, including failing to obtain or follow an engineer’s advice;
• Unsafe work at height;
• Traffic management is missing or inadequate;
• Breaching the ‘no go zone’ for overhead power lines;
• Powered mobile plant is unsuitable for demolition;
• Safe Work Method Statements (SWMS) are missing, inadequate or not followed.

Controlling demolition risks
Demolition must be planned so the most effective measures are used to control the risks so far as reasonably practicable. Planning should also address situations which could arise during the demolition process, such as fire, adverse weather, uncovering hidden asbestos or unplanned structural collapse.

A documented demolition plan should be developed, especially if the scope of works are large, complex or have significant risks to any person.

As demolition work is HRCW, it must not start until a SWMS is prepared. Employers and self-employed persons must stop the work if the SWMS is not being followed or the risks are not being controlled.

Note: SWMS are required even if there is a documented demolition plan.

Demolition may involve other HRCW hazards and risks; these must also be addressed in the various SWMS required for the work.

The SWMS must:
• identify work that is HRCW,
• state the hazards and risks to health or safety,
• sufficiently describe measures to control those risks,
• describe the manner in which the risk control measures are to be implemented.

Before any demolition work starts any identified asbestos must be removed, so far as is reasonably practicable. Asbestos removal must be done in accordance with the OHS Regulations.

Risk control measures
The employer or self-employed person must eliminate the risks or part of the risks associated with the demolition. If that is not reasonably practicable they must reduce the risks by using highest level of control measures that is reasonably practicable, as outlined in the table below. A combination of control measures will usually be needed.

Hierarchy of Risk Control for construction work

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>Eliminate all or part of the risk, eg, abolish electricity supply, ensure gas lines are purged.</td>
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<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Reduce the remaining risk or part of the risk by implementing one or a combination of the following:  • substitute a new activity, procedure, process or plant that is of lesser risk; eg replace manual demolition with mechanical demolition,  • isolate persons from the hazard; eg establish a large exclusion zone around the structure,  • use engineering controls; eg powered mobile plant is fitted with appropriate falling object and operator protective structures.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Any remaining risk or part of the risk must be reduced with administrative controls; eg signage, induction, work processes, and warning signage.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>Any remaining risk or part of the risk must be reduced by using appropriate personal protective equipment; eg helmets, masks, boots.</td>
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Review
Review and if necessary revise control measures:

• before making a change to the way the work is performed or if new or additional information about hazards becomes available,
• if the measures do not adequately control the risks, or
• after receiving a request from a health and safety representative (HSR).

Consultation
Employees and their HSRs must be consulted when identifying or assessing hazards and risks, and when determining or reviewing risk controls, so far as is reasonably practicable.
Further Information
Visit www.worksafe.vic.gov.au to download the following publications:

- Code of Practice, Demolition, 1991
- Compliance Code, Prevention of Falls in General Construction, 2008
- Code of Practice, Prevention of Falls in Housing Construction, 2004
- Guidance Note, Preventing Falls from Earth Moving Equipment, 2012
- Guidance Note: Removing Asbestos before demolition or refurbishment work 2010
- Information About - Asbestos register, 2014
- Information About, Safe Work Method Statements, 2015

Contact WorkSafe’s Advisory Service on (03) 9641 1444 or free call 1800 136 089.

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