WorkSafe ACT

Safe Work Method Statements [SWMS]

Updated: Wed, 24 Oct 2012 13:49:49 +1100
Printed: Thu, 23 May 2013 18:34:38 +1000
Revision: 45

Definition of High Risk Construction Work

High risk construction work (as defined in Section 291 of the Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011 and explained in Chapter 1 of the Work Health and safety (Construction Work) Code of Practice) must not be carried out unless a safe work method statement (SWMS) is prepared.

High risk construction work means construction work that-

1. involves a risk of a person falling more than 2m; or
2. is carried out on a telecommunication tower; or
3. involves demolition of an element of a structure that is loadâ€‘bearing or otherwise related to the physical integrity of the structure; or
4. involves, or is likely to involve, the disturbance of asbestos; or
5. involves structural alterations or repairs that require temporary support to prevent collapse; or
6. is carried out in or near a confined space; or
7. is carried out in or near-
    1. a shaft or trench with an excavated depth greater than 1.5m; or
    2. a tunnel; or
8. involves the use of explosives; or
9. is carried out on or near pressurised gas distribution mains or piping; or
10. is carried out on or near chemical, fuel or refrigerant lines; or
11. is carried out on or near energised electrical installations or services; or
12. is carried out in an area that may have a contaminated or flammable atmosphere; or
13. involves tiltâ€‘up or precast concrete; or
14. is carried out on, in or adjacent to a road, railway, shipping lane or other traffic corridor that is in use by traffic other than pedestrians; or
15. is carried out in an area at a workplace in which there is any movement of powered mobile plant; or
16. is carried out in an area in which there are artificial extremes of temperature; or
17. is carried out in or near water or other liquid that involves a risk of drowning; or
18. involves diving work.

What is a SWMS?

The primary purpose of a SWMS is to enable supervisors, workers and any other persons at the workplace

to understand the requirements that have been established to carry out the high risk construction work in a safe and healthy manner. It sets out the work activities in logical sequences and identifies hazards and describes control measures.

Any activity, no matter how simple or complex can be broken down into a series of basic steps that will permit a systematic analysis of each part of the activity for hazards and potential accidents. The description of the process should not be so broad that it leaves out activities with the potential to cause accidents and prevents proper identification of the hazards nor is it necessary to go into fine detail of the tasks.

The aim of a SWMS is to:

- describe the activity or task to be undertaken
- identify the resources, manpower and skills associated with the task
- assess and select control measures (as appropriate)
- systematically plan the job the activity so it can be completed efficiently and effectively.

The SWMS must be able to be easily read by those who need to know what has been planned to manage the risks and implement the control measures and ensure the work is being carried out in accordance with the SWMS. Relevant persons include:

- the supervisor of the high risk construction work
- the worker carrying out the high risk construction work
- the principal contractor (if it is a construction project) or the person who has management and control over the high risk construction work.

Click here for an example of a basic SWMS template.

Who is responsible for preparing SWMS?

A person conducting a business or undertaking that includes the carrying out of high risk construction work must ensure a SWMS is prepared or has already been prepared by another person before the proposed work commences.

A person conducting a business or undertaking (in consultation with workers who will be directly engaged in the high risk construction work) is best placed to prepare the SWMS because they understand the work being carried out and the workers undertaking the work and can ensure the SWMS is implemented, monitored and reviewed correctly.

There may be situations where there are different types of high risk construction work occurring at the same time at the same workplace, for example, work is being carried out:

- where there is a risk of a person falling more than 2 metres
- on a trench with an excavated depth greater than 1.5 metres.

If this is the case, it is possible for one SWMS to be prepared to cover all the high risk construction work being carried out at the workplace. Alternatively, a separate SWMS can be prepared for each type of high

risk construction work. If separate SWMS are prepared, thought must be given to how the different work activities may impact on each other and whether this may lead to inconsistencies between the various control measures.

Example

A contractor is engaged to work on a structure that is above 2 metres. Another contractor is engaged to carry out work using powered mobile plant such as a crane operation. Both contractors are required to prepare SWMS:

- The first contractor must ensure a SWMS is prepared for the work that is being carried out above 2 metres.
- The second contractor must ensure a SWMS is prepared for the work on the powered mobile plant.

In this case, the contractors may decide to prepare one SWMS to cover both types of high risk construction work or they may decide to prepare separate SWMS. If separate SWMS are being prepared, consultation, coordination and cooperation between the contractors must occur to the extent necessary t o avoid inconsistencies and ensure that each contractor is carrying the work out safely.

Preparing a SWMS

When preparing a SWMS the following must be taken into account:

- the circumstance at the workplace that may affect the way in which the high risk construction work is carried out
- on a construction project, the WHS management plan prepared by the principal contractor.

The SWMS must:

- identify the work that is high risk construction work
- specify hazards relating to the high risk construction work and risks to health and safety associated with those hazards
- describe the measures to be implemented to control the risks
- describe how the control measures are to be implemented, monitored and reviewed.

A SWMS should also include the following information:

- the person conducting a business or undertaking"s name, address and ABN (if they have one)
- details of the person(s) responsible for ensuring implementation, monitoring and compliance with the SWMS
- if the work is being carried out at a construction project:
    - the name of the principal contractor
    - the address where the high risk construction work will be carried out
    - the date the SWMS was prepared and the date it was provided to the principal contractor
- the review date (if any).

A SWMS may also include the names of workers that have been consulted on the content of the SWMS,

the date the consultation occurred and the signature of each worker acknowledging their participation in this consultation and the opportunity to discuss the proposed measures.

The content of a SWMS should provide clear direction on the control measures to be implemented. There should be no statements that require a decision to be made by supervisors or workers. For example, the statement, "use appropriate PPE" does not detail the control measures. The control measures should be clearly specified and the example of a completed SWMS template in the Construction Code of Practice illustrates how this may be done without going into such detail that the relevant workers would have difficulty comprehending or implementing the safe work methods outlined in the SWMS.

Workers and their health and safety representatives should be consulted in the preparation of the SWMS. If there are no workers engaged at the planning stage, consultation should occur with workers when the SWMS is first made available to workers for example, during general construction induction training, or when it is reviewed such as during workplace-specific training or a toolbox talk.

A generic SWMS may be prepared and used for those work activities that are carried out on a regular basis. The content of this type of SWMS may be refined over a number of years and include consultation with workers and other persons conducting a business or undertaking. Prior to each new activity, the SWMS must be reviewed and revised to ensure it applies to the high risk construction work and the actual workplace.

Implementing a SWMS

Complying with a SWMS

All persons conducting a business or undertaking who are involved in high risk construction work must develop and implement arrangements to ensure the work is carried out in accordance with the SWMS. Arrangements may include a system of routine or random workplace inspections. For example, asking workers and supervisors a few questions about the control measures used in the SWMS to see if they understand what has to be done.

If the work is not being carried out in accordance with the SWMS, then the work must stop immediately or as soon as it is safe to do so. Work must not resume until the work can be carried out in accordance with the SWMS. If work is stopped, the work and the SWMS should be reviewed to identify non-compliance and ensure that either the method in the SWMS is the most practical and safest way of doing the task. If another method is identified as being a safer option, the SWMS should be revised to take into account this change prior to work re-commencing.

If the high risk construction work is being carried out in connection with a construction project, a person conducting a business or undertaking must not commence high risk construction work unless the principal contractor has been provided a copy of the SWMS. If the principal contractor is not aware of the content of the SWMS then they will not be able to comply with their duties. The principal contractor must ensure that the person conducting a business or undertaking does not commence high risk construction work until they have been provided a copy of the SWMS.

Providing information and instruction

A person conducting a business or undertaking must ensure that all workers who will be involved in high risk construction work are provided with information and instruction so they:

- understand the hazards and the risks arising from the work
- understand and implement the risk controls in a SWMS
- know what to do if the work is not being conducted in accordance with the SWMS.

For example, this information and instruction may be provided during general construction induction training, workplace-specific or during a toolbox talk by principal contractor, contractor or subcontractor.

Keeping the SWMS

The SWMS must be kept and be available for inspection until at least the high risk construction work is completed. Where a SWMS is revised, all versions should be kept.

The SWMS may be kept at the workplace where the high risk construction work will be carried out. If this is not possible, then the SWMS should be kept at a location where it can be delivered to the workplace promptly.

If a notifiable incident occurs in relation to high risk construction work to which the SWMS relates, then the SWMS must be kept for at least 2 years from the occurrence of the notifiable incident. If the construction work at the workplace has ceased within that period then the person conducting a business or undertaking should keep the SWMS readily available for inspection.

Making the SWMS available

A person conducting a business or undertaking must ensure the SWMS is available to any person engaged to carry out the high risk construction work and for inspection under the WHS Act for the whole of the period for which it must be kept until the high risk construction work to which it relates is completed or for at least 2 years from the occurrence of the notifiable incident.

Reviewing a SWMS

A SWMS must be reviewed regularly to make sure it remains effective. A SWMS must be reviewed (and revised if necessary) if relevant control measures are revised.

The review process should be carried out in consultation with workers (including contractors and subcontractors) who may be affected by the operation of the SWMS and their health and safety representatives who represented that work group at the workplace.

When a SWMS has been revised the person conducting a business or undertaking must ensure:

- all persons involved with the high risk construction work are advised that a revision has been made and how they can access the revised SWMS. For a construction project, the principal contractor should be given a copy of the revised SWMS
- all persons who will need to change a work procedure or system as a result of the review are advised of the changes in a way that will enable them to implement their duties consistently with

the revised SWMS
- all workers that will be involved in the high risk construction work are provided with the relevant information and instruction that will assist them to understand and implement the revised SWMS.

WorkSafe ACT"s simple guide to risk assessment.

WorkSafe ACT"s guidance on the Hierarchy of Controls

WorkSafe ACT's Template SWMS

Download a template SWMS.

Powerpoint Presentation

Click here for a copy of WorkSafe ACT's overheads from a recent presentation on SWMS.