

SAFE WORK METHOD STATEMENTS – HIGH RISK CONSTRUCTION WORK

This guidance note outlines the key requirements for developing and maintaining a safe work method statement (SWMS).

PURPOSE OF A SWMS

The purpose of a SWMS is to ensure there is a clear plan for how high risk construction work can be carried out safely.¹ Some examples of high risk construction work include, but are not limited to:

- a risk of a person falling more than 2 metres
- involves demolition of an element of a structure that is related to the physical integrity of the structure
- involves, or is likely to involve, disturbing asbestos
- is carried out on, in or adjacent to a road, railway, shipping lane or other traffic corridor in use by traffic other than pedestrians
- is carried out on or near energised electrical installations or services
- involves tilt-up or precast concrete, and/or
- is carried out in an area of a workplace where there is any movement of powered mobile plant.

The full list of high risk construction work is detailed in section 291 of the [WHS Regulation \(2011\)](#).

A SWMS is an administrative WHS risk control used to support higher order controls. A SWMS is different from other WHS documents that focus on specific tasks or processes, such as a job safety analysis or safe operating procedure. A SWMS is used as a tool to ensure supervisors and workers are able to implement, understand, monitor and review the control measures used to safely undertake high risk construction work.

One SWMS can be used for work that involves multiple high risk construction work activities. Alternatively, a separate SWMS can be prepared for each type of high risk construction work.

If separate SWMS are prepared, the ways the different work activities may impact each other should be considered; particularly where individual SWMS could lead to inconsistencies between control measures.

A SWMS must be developed in accordance with section 299 of the WHS Regulations (2011).

¹ **Note:** A SWMS must also be completed for work on energised electrical equipment. The [Managing Electrical Risks at the Workplace Code of Practice](#) provides more information about electrical work and risk controls.

DEVELOPING AND CONSULTING SWMS

A person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) must ensure that a SWMS is prepared, or has already been prepared by another person, before high risk construction work commences.

The principal contractor, builder and subcontractors should consult with each other to determine who is in the best position to prepare a SWMS. The person responsible for carrying out the high risk construction work is usually best placed to prepare a SWMS in consultation with workers who will be directly engaged with the work.

Consultation during the development of the SWMS is very important. PCBUs must consult with workers to ensure they understand the details of a SWMS and what they are required to do to implement and maintain the risk controls.

This duty to consult is based on the recognition that worker input and participation improves decision-making about health and safety matters and assists in reducing work-related injuries and disease.

Sharing information and using the knowledge and experience of workers will help make sure the work is performed in accordance with a SWMS. If there is a Health and Safety Representative (HSR) at the workplace they should also be consulted when developing a SWMS. PCBUs must ensure that the principal contractor has a copy of all relevant SWMS that will be used at the worksite.

A PCBU who fails to ensure a SWMS has been completed can face penalties of up to \$6 000 for an individual or \$30 000 for a body corporate.

INFORMATION THAT MUST BE INCLUDED IN A SWMS

High risk construction work must be carried out in accordance with a SWMS. The PCBU must put in place arrangements to ensure SWMS are being complied with.

A SWMS must:

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

A SWMS must be prepared taking into account all relevant matters, including the circumstances at the workplace that may affect the way high risk construction work is carried out. For example, the size or layout of the workplace will affect how high risk construction work is carried out and the control measures that can be implemented. If the high risk construction work is carried out in connection with a construction project, a WHS management plan must also be prepared for the workplace.

A SWMS should focus on the hazards identified for the high risk construction work and the control measures to be put in place for the work to be carried out safely.

The content of a SWMS should provide clear direction on the control measures to be implemented. *A lengthy, overly detailed SWMS may be difficult to understand, apply, monitor and review.*

Generalised statements should be avoided in a SWMS, including non-specific controls that require a decision to be made by supervisors or workers. For example, 'use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE)' is a statement that is both general and requires the worker to make a decision about what is suitable. Instead, the PCBU should consult with the workers undertaking the work to determine the specific PPE that needs to be used for the activity and then communicated clearly in the SWMS.

A SWMS must be prepared so it can be fully understood by all workers undertaking the work. It may be necessary to translate the SWMS into different languages or include pictures, pictograms, and infographics to meet different literacy needs. Workers must be able to understand the hazards and risks arising from the work and understand how to use the risk controls in a SWMS. Workers must also know what to do if the work is not being conducted in accordance with the SWMS.

The information and instruction for workers about a SWMS can be provided during general construction induction training, workplace-specific training or during a toolbox talk by the principal contractor, contractor or subcontractor.

MONITORING AND REVIEWING THE SWMS

A SWMS must be reviewed regularly to ensure it remains effective. A SWMS must also be reviewed and updated if control measures are revised or changed. As with developing a SWMS, a review should be done in consultation with all relevant workers, contractors, subcontractors and HSRs. The review should take into account any previous incidents, including new or revised control measures, if relevant.

When a SWMS has been revised, the PCBU 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 must also 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 the revised SWMS, and
- all workers involved in the high risk construction work are provided with suitable information and instruction that will assist them to understand and use the revised SWMS.

The task to implement, monitor and review control measures, such as those in a SWMS, may be allocated by the PCBU to another person at the workplace, such as the supervisor of the activity that a SWMS is for. However, the WHS duties of the PCBU are not transferrable. The PCBU must be satisfied the control measures in a SWMS are implemented, monitored and reviewed to ensure the health and safety of workers.

The WHS management plan must include details of the arrangements for the collection and any assessment, monitoring and review of SWMS at the workplace.

Monitoring of work that is carried out in accordance with a SWMS can be done by directly observing the work. Other ways of monitoring could include a system of routine or random workplace inspections to ensure compliance.

If work is not being carried out in accordance with a 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.

For more information on the requirements of a SWMS and managing the risks of construction, see the [Construction Work Code of Practice](#) and the [Safe Work Method Statements webpage](#). See the links below for a template and sample SWMS:

- [Safe work method statement - Template \(DOC 93KB\)](#) or [\(PDF 184KB\)](#) (also provided as Attachment A)
- [High Risk Construction Work Safe Work Method Statement Sample \(DOC 283KB\)](#) or [\(PDF 354KB\)](#)

KEEPING A SWMS

A SWMS should be kept at the workplace where the high risk construction work will be carried out, including electronic copies. If this is not possible then a SWMS should be kept at a location that is easily accessible to workers.

The PCBU must keep a copy of a SWMS available for relevant workers and for inspection by WorkSafe ACT Inspectors.

A copy must be kept until the high risk construction work is completed. If a notifiable incident occurs in connection with the high risk construction work a SWMS applies to, the SWMS must be kept for at least 2 years after the incident occurs.

Where a SWMS has been revised, every version should be kept.

CONSULTING WITH OTHER DUTY HOLDERS

The WHS Act requires each person with a health and safety duty to consult, cooperate and coordinate activities with each person who has a duty over the same matter.

Consultation between duty holders ensures everyone associated with the work has a shared understanding of what the hazards and risks are, which workers could be affected and how the risks will be eliminated or controlled.

If there is more than one duty holder at a workplace where high risk construction work is undertaken, for example when a PCBU engages a subcontractor (who is a PCBU for their respective business), they must consult and cooperate with each other to coordinate who will prepare the SWMS and who will consult with the affected workers and their representatives.

The principal contractor must document the arrangements in place for consultation, cooperation and coordination between the PCBUs at the worksite in the WHS management plan.

The principal contractor also has a duty to take reasonable steps to obtain a SWMS before high risk construction work starts. This can be done by:

- asking contractors to provide a copy of the SWMS before they start work and to have the SWMS available on site, and
- making it clear in the WHS management plan that the SWMS must be provided to the principal contractor before work starts.

For more information on consultation, cooperation and coordination in the workplace, see the [Work Health and Safety Consultation, Cooperation and Coordination Code of Practice](#).

For information on developing a Work Health and Safety Management plan, see the *Guidance note: Work health and safety management plans*.

ATTACHMENT A— SAFE WORK METHOD STATEMENT TEMPLATE

Note: Work must be performed in accordance with this safe work method statement (SWMS). This SWMS must be kept and be available for inspection until the high risk construction work to which this SWMS relates is completed. If the SWMS is revised, every version should be kept. If a notifiable incident occurs in relation to the high risk construction work in this SWMS, the SWMS must be kept for at least 2 years from the date of the notifiable incident.

Person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU):	[PCBU Name, contact details]	Principal Contractor (PC)	[Name, contact details]
Works Manager:	[Name, contact phone]	Date SWMS provided to PC:	Click here to enter a date.
Work activity:	[Job description]	Workplace location:	Click here to enter text.

High risk construction work:

- ☐ Risk of a person falling more than 2 metres (note: in some jurisdictions this is 3 metres)
- ☐ Work on a telecommunication tower
- ☐ Likely to involve disturbing asbestos
- ☐ Work in or near a confined space
- ☐ Use of explosives
- ☐ Work on or near chemical, fuel or refrigerant lines
- ☐ Work in an area that may have a contaminated or flammable atmosphere
- ☐ Work on, in or adjacent to a road, railway, shipping lane or other traffic corridor in use by traffic other than pedestrians
- ☐ Work in an area with movement of powered mobile plant
- ☐ Work in or near water or other liquid that involves a risk of drowning
- ☐ Work that involves the cutting of crystalline silica material using a power tool or another mechanical process.
- ☐ Demolition of load-bearing structure
- ☐ Temporary load-bearing support for structural alterations or repairs
- ☐ Work in or near a shaft or trench deeper than 1.5 m or a tunnel
- ☐ Work on or near pressurised gas mains or piping
- ☐ Work on or near energised electrical installations or services
- ☐ Tilt-up or precast concrete elements
- ☐ Work in areas with artificial extremes of temperature
- ☐ Diving work

Person responsible for ensuring compliance with SWMS:	Click here to enter text.	Date SWMS received:	Click here to enter a date.
What measures are in place to ensure compliance with the SWMS?	Click here to enter text.		
Person responsible for reviewing SWMS control measures:	Click here to enter text.	Date SWMS received by reviewer:	Click here to enter a date.
How will the SWMS control measures be reviewed?	Click here to enter text.		
Review date:	Click here to enter a date.	Reviewer's signature:	

What are the tasks involved?	What are the hazards and risks?	What are the control measures?
List the work tasks in a logical order	Identify the hazards and risks that may cause harm to workers or the public	Describe what will be done to control the risk. What will you do to make the activity as safe as possible?
Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.
Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.

Name of worker(s)	Worker signature(s)
Click here to enter text.	
Click here to enter text.	
Date SWMS received by workers	Click here to enter a date.