



SAFETY ALERT

Working at heights

INCIDENT

An excavator operator slipped and fell approximately 3.5 metres to the ground while undoing a hydraulic fitting on the top of the excavator boom. He sustained serious injuries to his left leg and right pelvis.



The operator fell approximately 3.5 metres from the top of the excavator boom to the ground.

ISSUES

A number of similar incidents have occurred recently where persons have been seriously injured while working at heights. Recent Safety Alerts addressing these incidents include:

1. SA06-04 *Working at heights*
2. SA06-02 *Working at heights – prevention of falls and fall arrest*
3. SA04-25 *Fall from elevated work platform*
4. SA04-20 *Fall from truck when Tarping*
5. SA04-16 *Serious spinal injury*

From these examples there appears to be a culture at mine sites, both large and small, where persons working at heights do not systematically identify and control the hazards associated with working at heights before commencing work activities. A culture of “it won’t happen to me” appears to exist.

If working at heights is identified, effective controls to prevent falls must be implemented prior to starting the job.

CIRCUMSTANCES:

The operator was in the process of repairing a leaking hydraulic fitting on the excavator boom. During the process of undoing a hydraulic coupling on the boom, the operator slipped and fell approximately 3.5 metres to the ground.

INVESTIGATION

Investigations are continuing but contributing factors include, but were not limited to, the following:

- The operator was not wearing fall protection and did not have a fit-for-purpose work platform from which to work.
- No JSA or risk assessment was undertaken prior to commencing the repair work.
- The boom of the excavator could have been lowered to provide a safe work location, eliminating the need to climb up the boom.
- It appears the hydraulic pipe running up the boom may not have needed to be removed to repair the oil leak.

RECOMMENDATIONS

All mine management should be aware of the duty of care under the NSW Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000:

8 Duties of employers

(1) Employees

An employer must ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of all the employees of the employer.

That duty extends (without limitation) to the following:

- (b) ensuring that any plant or substance provided for use by the employees at work is safe and without risks to health when properly used,
- (c) ensuring that systems of work and the working environment of the employees are safe and without risks to health,
- (d) providing such information, instruction, training and supervision as may be necessary to ensure the employees' health and safety at work.

Mine management must:

1. Implement safe systems for work at heights.
2. Instruct and train employees in these safe work systems.
3. Enforce these safe systems through supervision and discipline.

NOTE: Please ensure all relevant people in your organisation receive a copy of this Safety Alert, and are informed of its content and recommendations. This Safety Alert should be processed in a systematic manner through the mine's information and communication process. It should also be placed on the mine's notice board.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Regan', written in a cursive style.

Rob Regan
DIRECTOR
MINE SAFETY OPERATIONS BRANCH
NSW DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

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