



# OH&S Bulletin

## **Mobile Scaffolds They Might be Small But They Can Cause Big Injuries**

Two people seriously injured from falling off small mobile scaffolds should serve as a warning to workers in the construction industry. Especially at low heights, it is easy to become complacent, but falls from even one or two metres can be fatal. In fact one study found that a person is more likely to die falling from a low height because they have less time to correct their fall and avoid hitting their head.

Anybody putting together a mobile scaffold should have at least some basic training. Whether a certificate of competency is required or not, the Occupational Health & Safety (OHS) Act 2004 places responsibility on employers to provide information, instruction, training and supervision as necessary so that workers can work safely and without risk to health. The OHS (Plant) Regulations 1995 also place the onus on the employer to identify risks and provide the appropriate training.

Suppliers of mobile scaffolds should provide a diagram and instructions for the correct use of the scaffold. Unfortunately this is not being done. As a result the union has seen a spate of incidents involving mobile scaffolds, at times with tragic consequences. It may seem like putting a jigsaw puzzle together, but at least you know that the jigsaw isn't finished when you leave out one or more pieces.

Bracing a scaffold is critical for maximum strength. It might seem like overkill because a couple of blokes don't weigh much, but once you add a few tools it's a different story. You might not be planning to use anything heavy but you don't know who's going to jump on when you're not using it.

One of the most common problems is that of access. There is a requirement that there be internal access for any scaffold more than two metres. This means that not only should there be a ladder, it should be inside the scaffold. It's easy to slip climbing up the outside and modern light scaffolds can tip over if there's too much weight on one side.

It's particularly alarming to see blokes working off mobiles without handrails and/or proper work platforms. It's so easy to step backwards without thinking, or lose your footing, especially if your platform is incomplete or uneven. Even from a couple of metres a fall onto can kill or maim – it just isn't worth your life for a couple of lousy handrails or scaffold planks.

Missing kickboards may not seem like a big deal, but without them it isn't hard to put a foot over the edge and land in a heap. Even if you don't come off the scaffold you can do yourself some damage, especially if you're using dangerous tools or substances.

You can be lucky. Some people survive falls from incredible heights and get up and brush themselves off. Others just break an arm or a leg and come good after a while. Others land on their heads or their backs and are seriously injured, or die. Your life is too important to take short cuts with safety. There's no guarantee you'll never be hurt on site, but there's no point setting yourself up for a fall.

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