



Small construction sites

THE ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL
HEALTH AND SAFETY TOOLKIT

WORKSAFE



ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit¹ provides useful checklists for common health and safety issues on small construction sites. It will help you manage or avoid these issues to ensure the health and safety of everyone on and around your worksite, including workers, clients and members of the public. Links to more detailed advice are included where relevant.

Doing nothing is not an option

Construction is among the top four sectors for highest worker injury rates. Worker fatalities are more than double the average for all other sectors. The most common injuries are ones to the lower back and spine. The most common cause of serious harm injuries are slips, trips and falls from height. Males aged 20-24 are most likely to be injured.

The costs of workplace injuries to New Zealand business are substantial – ACC pay more than \$100 million dollars per year in the construction sector. The direct and indirect costs of all workplace injuries in New Zealand are over \$1.3 billion.

Make use of this toolkit. If we all work together we can make the construction industry a healthier and safer place to work in.

Health and safety legislation

The Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 (HSWA) is New Zealand's key work health and safety law. It introduces new responsibilities for managing the work related risks that can cause serious injury, illness or even death. If you have good health and safety practices in place now, you are likely to be well on your way. However the new Act introduces some new features and it's important for you to review your approach to work health and safety.

How to contact WorkSafe

For further advice on health and safety at work, contact the WorkSafe Response Team on (freephone) **0800 030 040**.

¹ The content in this toolkit has been adapted from the Health and Safety Executive publication *The absolutely essential health and safety toolkit for the smaller construction contractor* published in 2008 and available at www.hse.gov.uk. It does not cover legal requirements and is a guide only; for information on how to comply with the law, see the relevant legislation at www.legislation.govt.nz

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1.0 General management

IN THIS SECTION:

- 1.1** Managing a small construction site
- 1.2** When to notify WorkSafe
- 1.3** Contracting and subcontracting

1.1 Managing a small construction site

The checklists below cover some things to consider when managing a small construction site under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 (HSWA) which will impose duties on the 'PCBU'.

What is a PCBU?

The HSWA defines 'PCBU'. It is essentially a person conducting a business or undertaking, whether alone or with others and whether for profit or gain or not. The PCBU is in the best position to control risks to work health and safety. This is why the PCBU has the primary duty to ensure health and safety.

Despite its name, a PCBU can be a business entity, such as a company, as well as an individual person. An individual person will generally be a PCBU if they are a sole trader or a self-employed person.

Examples of a PCBU include:

- a manufacturing business
- an import business
- an owner-driver of their own courier business
- a self-employed person operating their own business
- a partnership
- a building company, whether a principal contractor or a sub-contractor
- a not-for-profit organisation that employs admin staff.

PCBUs have a number of duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act. PCBUs with overlapping duties must work together to achieve health and safety at work.

Keep this in mind when reading the checklists. Many of the things covered in this booklet will help PCBUs to meet their duties under the HSWA.

See the WorkSafe website for more information.

Do you make sure workers:

- are trained, competent and fit to do the job safely and without putting their own or others' health and safety at risk?
- are properly supervised and given clear instructions?
- have access to washing and toilet facilities?
- have the right tools, equipment, plant and personal protective equipment?
- are involved in discussions about health and safety issues?
- are given opportunities to participate in improving health and safety?



1.2 When to notify WorkSafe

In an emergency: *call the emergency services by dialling 111.*

A PCBU must notify WorkSafe as soon as possible if any of the following 'notifiable events' occur:

- the death of a person
- a notifiable injury or illness
- notifiable incident.

Call the WorkSafe Response Team on freephone **0800 030 040** (24 hours) and choose option 1.

Fill in and submit a notification form within seven days at [worksafe.govt.nz](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz)
Reporting: Serious Harm.

Some types of work also require you to notify WorkSafe. These include where a worker could fall 5 m or more, some excavation work, working involving asbestos or working underground. For a full list of notifiable work and more information on notifiable events, see the WorkSafe website.

For a hazardous substances emergency: call the New Zealand Fire Service on 111 and then the WorkSafe Response Team directly on 0800 030 040.

DON'T DISTURB THE SCENE

You must not interfere with an accident scene until authorised by a health and safety inspector. Exceptions include certain situations, such as when people or property are at risk. If you require scene clearance or other immediate assistance from a health and safety inspector, call WorkSafe on 0800 030 040.

1.3 Contracting and subcontracting

When contracting or subcontracting work do you:

- check the health and safety performance of the people you plan to use?
- give them the health and safety information they need for the work?
- talk about the work with them?
- hold regular discussions about how the work is going, including safety problems and concerns?
- make sure that you have provided everything you agreed (eg safe scaffolds, the right plant, access to toilets and other welfare facilities, etc)?
- check their performance and remedy any shortcomings?

For more information for PCBUs check for updates on the WorkSafe and New Zealand Legislation websites:

[worksafe.govt.nz](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz)

www.legislation.govt.nz

2.0

Health and safety checklist

IN THIS SECTION:

- 2.1 Site and services
- 2.2 Working at height
- 2.3 Moving material
- 2.4 Working with vehicles and machinery
- 2.5 Critical health risks
- 2.6 Worker wellbeing
- 2.7 Emergency situations

The following pages provide you with an essential checklist of some of the hazards most commonly found on construction sites.

The questions will help you decide whether your site is a safe and healthy place to work. It is not a full list.

2.1 Site and services

Access on site

- Can everyone get to their place of work safely – and work there safely?
- Are access routes in good condition and clearly signposted?
- Do edges that people could fall from have suitable edge protection?
- Are holes protected with clearly marked and fixed covers to prevent falls?
- Is the site tidy, and are materials stored safely?
- Is lighting good enough?



Electricity and other services

- Have all necessary services been provided on site before work begins? Have you also identified existing services present on site (eg electric cables or gas mains) and taken effective steps, if necessary, to prevent harm from them?
- Is the supply isolated from earth with a voltage between phase and earth conductors not exceeding 230 volts?
- Are electrical extension cords connected to power tools using a Residual Current Device (RCD) or Isolating Transformer?

- Are cables and leads protected from damage?
- Are all connections to the system properly made and are suitable plugs used?
- Are tools and equipment checked by users, visually examined on site and regularly inspected and tested by a competent person?
- Have hidden electricity cables and other services been located (eg with a locator and plans) and marked, and have you taken precautions for safe working?
- Where there are overhead lines, has the electricity supply been turned off, or have other precautions been taken, such as providing 'goal posts' or taped markers?



Protecting the public

- Is the worksite fenced off from the public?
- Do roadworks have barriers around them and are the barriers lit?
- Are the public protected from falling material?
- Is clear signage present to warn people of danger (eg 'Keep out', 'Asbestos removal in progress')?

When work has stopped for the day:

- is the boundary secure?
- have steps been taken to prevent any unauthorised access (eg are all ladders removed or their rungs boarded so they can't be used)?
- are excavations and openings securely covered or fenced off?
- is all plant immobilised to prevent unauthorised use?
- are bricks and materials safely stacked?
- are flammable or dangerous substances locked away in secure storage places?



2.2 Working at height

- Have you ensured there is appropriate and fit-for-purpose means to prevent workers from falling from height?
- Have you planned the work properly and identified suitable precautions to make sure work can be carried out safely?
- Have you thought about whether you can avoid working at height by using different equipment or a different work method?
- Can you use equipment that will prevent a fall from happening, such as scaffolding or a mobile elevating work platform?
- Can you put in place measures to reduce the distance and consequences of a fall should one happen, such as nets, soft landing systems or personal fall prevention and protection equipment (eg a harness system)?
- Will the weather conditions threaten the health and safety of those carrying out the work?
- Have you thought about all the options and are you certain that you are gaining access to height using the safest means possible?

For more information, see [worksafe.govt.nz](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz)

Scaffolds

- Are scaffolds erected, altered and dismantled by competent people?
- Are all uprights provided with base plates (and, where necessary, timber soleboards)?
- Are all uprights, ledgers, braces and out riggers in position?
- Is the scaffold secured to the building or structure in enough places to prevent collapse?
- Are there double guard rails and toe boards, or other suitable protection, at every edge to prevent falling?
- Are additional guards provided to prevent stacked materials such as bricks falling from scaffolds (eg kickboards, toeboards or screens)?
- Are the working platforms fully planked, and are the planks arranged to avoid tipping or tripping?
- Are there effective barriers or warning notices in place to stop people using an incomplete scaffold (eg where working platforms are not fully planked)?
- Is the scaffold strong enough to carry the weight of materials stored on it and are these evenly distributed?



- Are scaffolds being properly maintained?
- Does a competent person inspect the scaffold or proprietary mobile scaffold regularly (eg at least once a week; and always after it has been altered, damaged and following bad weather)?
- Are the results of inspections recorded?
- Are scaffolds erected using safe work methods, and are they being used according to the supplier's and/or manufacturer's instructions?
- Have the wheels of mobile scaffolds been locked when in use and are the platforms empty when they are moved?
- Are gates (including guardrails being used as gates) and hatches across access points self-closing?
- Are working platforms placed as close as practicable to the working face to reduce the risk of people or materials falling through the gap?

For more information see [worksafe.govt.nz](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz)

Ladders

- Choose the right tool for the job - can you buy or hire some alternative equipment that would provide a safer means of access?
- Are they in good condition?
- Do ladders rest against a solid surface and not on fragile or insecure materials?



- Are ladders secured at the top and bottom to prevent them slipping sideways and outwards?
- Do ladders rise at least a metre above the landing place? If not, are there other handholds available?
- Are the ladders positioned so that users don't have to overstretch?
- Do you have to use the top three rungs of a stepladder? If so your stepladder is too short.
- Is the user competent? Those using ladders should be trained to use the equipment safely.
- Can users maintain three points of contact at all times?
- Are materials being transported safely (ie not carried up a ladder)? Carrying materials up a ladder increases the risk of falling.

For more information see [worksafe.govt.nz](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz)

Roofwork

- Is there edge protection to stop people or materials falling?
- Where nets are used, have they been installed properly?
- Have you identified brittle roof materials, such as cement sheets and roof lights?
- Have you taken precautions to stop people falling through fragile materials when working on the roof (eg by providing barriers, covers or working platforms)?
- Are people kept away from the area below the roof work?
- Are roofworkers trained and experienced to recognise the risks and are they competent to do the work?

For more information see [worksafe.govt.nz](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz)

2.3 Moving material

Manual handling

- Are there heavy materials such as roof trusses, steel beams, kerbstones or bagged products that could cause injury if they have to be moved by hand?
- If so, can you:
 - choose lighter materials?
 - use trolleys, hoists, telehandlers and other plant or equipment so that manual lifting of heavy objects is kept to a minimum?
 - order materials such as cement and aggregates in units that are a manageable weight (eg 25 kg bags)?
 - avoid the repetitive laying of heavy building blocks or other masonry units (eg weighing more than 20 kg)?
- Have people been instructed and trained how to use lifting aids and other handling equipment safely?
- Have people been trained how to lift safely?

For more information see [worksafe.govt.nz](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz)



Loading and unloading goods

- Have you checked that the load has not moved or destabilised during the journey to site?
- Is there an exclusion zone around the loading/unloading area to keep people who are not involved away from the work?
- Have you planned your method of unloading?

- Does your lifting equipment have a current annual certificate?
- Do you have to access the back of the truck at all, or can the preparation work be done from ground level? If not:
 - do you have a safe way of getting up and down from the back of the vehicle?
 - what do you have in place to prevent workers from falling off the back of the vehicle?
 - are your employees provided with sensible safety footwear with a good grip?

For more information see [worksafe.govt.nz](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz)

Excavations

- Is the stability of the ground known to ensure against collapse? Or if the stability of the ground is not known, is there a support system in place for the excavation to prevent collapse, or has it been sloped or battered back to a safe angle? (Note: an excavation more than 1.5 m deep that is deeper than it is wide at the top must be notified to WorkSafe.)
- Is a safe method used for putting in the support, without people working in an unsupported trench?
- Is there safe access into the excavation (eg a sufficiently long, secured ladder)?
- Are there barriers or other protection to stop people and vehicles falling in?
- Is the excavation fenced off from unauthorised access?
- Are properly secured stop blocks provided to prevent tipping vehicles falling in?
- Could the excavation affect the stability of neighbouring structures or services?
- Are materials, spoil and plant stored away from the edge of the excavation to reduce the chance of a collapse?
- Is the excavation regularly inspected by a competent person?
- Are the results of inspections recorded?

For more information see [worksafe.govt.nz](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz)

2.4 Working with vehicles and machinery

Traffic, vehicles and plant

- Have prestart checks been done, and any issues dealt with?
- Are vehicles well maintained, and are log books and maintenance records present and up to date?
- Are vehicles only operated by people trained to do so (where applicable) and are manufacturer's instructions followed?
- Are vehicles and pedestrians kept apart?
- If not, do you:
 - provide barriers to separate them as much as you can?
 - display warning signs?
- Are people kept away from slewing vehicles, or, if not, can you use a zero tail swing machine?
- Are vehicles and plant properly maintained, for example:
 - do the steering, brakes, hydraulics, mirrors and any other vision aid work properly?
 - are tyres in good condition and at the correct pressure?
 - are reversing alarms active?

- Have you identified and put into place precautions to prevent or control exposure to hazardous substances, by:
 - doing the work in a different way, to remove the risk entirely?
 - using a less hazardous material?
 - using tools fitted with dust extraction?
 - using tools fitted with water suppression?
 - installing warning signs to show where work involving hazardous substances is taking place?
- Have workers had information and training so they know what the risks are from the hazardous substances used and produced on site, and what they need to do to avoid those risks?
- Have you arranged health monitoring for employees exposed to certain hazardous substances (eg lead, silica, cement, sensitisers such as twopack adhesives or coatings)?

For more information see [worksafe.govt.nz](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz)

Noise

- Have you identified and assessed workers' exposure to noise?
- Have workers had information and training so they know what the risks are from noise on site, and what they need to do to avoid those risks?
- Can the noise be reduced by using different working methods or selecting quieter plant (eg by fitting breakers and other plant or machinery with silencers)?
- Are people not involved in the work kept away from the source of the noise?
- Is suitable hearing protection provided and worn in noisy areas?
- Have hearing protection zones been marked?
- Have you arranged health surveillance for employees exposed to high levels of noise?

Personal protective equipment

- Is suitable equipment provided to protect the head, eyes, hands and feet where appropriate?
- Do workers wear their protective equipment, and do they wear it correctly?
- Have workers been trained in the safe use, care and storage of protective equipment?

For more information see [worksafe.govt.nz](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz)



2.6 Worker wellbeing

Amenities and facilities

- Has a suitable toilet been provided?
- Is there a clean wash basin, hot/warm water, soap and towel?
- Is wet-weather gear provided for those who have to work in wet conditions?
- Is there a place where workers can take shelter and have meals? Do they have access to drinking water?
- Is there a suitable first-aid kit?

For more information see [worksafe.govt.nz](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz)

Workloads and fatigue

- Do workers take regular, quality rest breaks in their working day?
- Are working hours reasonable and not too long? If longer working days are required, are start and finish times staggered, and/or are longer rest breaks and periods off work allowed?
- Are tasks scheduled suitably throughout a work period (eg critical jobs are avoided during the low body clock period of 3 pm to 5 pm)?
- Is work scheduled to allow enough time for completion?
- Are monitoring and limitations in place for overtime worked, consecutive night shifts, shift swapping and on-call duties?
- Are jobs rotated to minimise exposure to extreme temperature and excessive mental or physical demands?
- Is fit-for-purpose plant, machinery and equipment used?
- Are workloads practical and manageable, with consideration given to any work flow changes (eg machinery breakdowns or unplanned absences)?

Alcohol and drugs

- Is there a policy and procedure in place to constructively manage alcohol- and other drug-related hazards?
- Are workers monitored for signs of alcohol and drug use (eg dizziness, slurred speech, drowsiness, sudden aggressive or violent behaviour, lack of or impaired coordination/reflexes)?

For more information see [worksafe.govt.nz](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz)



2.7 Emergency situations

Emergencies

- Are there emergency procedures (eg for evacuating the site in case of fire)?
- Do people on site know what the procedures are and where the nearest emergency centre is?
- Is there a means of raising the alarm, and does it work?
- Is there a way to contact the emergency services from site?
- Are there enough suitable escape routes and are these kept clear?
- Are first aid arrangements good enough for the site, and is there someone available who can administer first aid if needed?

Fire

- Is the quantity of flammable materials, liquids and gases kept to a minimum?
- Are they properly stored (eg are gas cylinders chained in position)?
- Are flammable gas cylinders returned to a ventilated store at the end of the shift?
- Are smoking and other ignition sources banned in areas where gases or flammable liquids are stored or used?
- Are gas cylinders, associated hoses and equipment properly maintained and in good condition?
- When gas cylinders are not in use, are the valves fully closed?
- Is flammable and combustible waste removed regularly and stored in suitable bins or skips?
- Are suitable fire extinguishers provided?

Disclaimer

This publication provides general guidance. It is not possible for WorkSafe to address every situation that could occur in every workplace. This means that you will need to think about this guidance and how to apply it to your particular circumstances.

WorkSafe regularly reviews and revises guidance to ensure that it is up-to-date. If you are reading a printed copy of this guidance, please check worksafe.govt.nz to confirm that your copy is the current version.

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