

Advisory note

A service to A.G. Coombs clients

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Safe Access for Building Maintenance

Victorian Law requires building owners and occupiers to provide a safe environment for all building occupants, whether they be employees, visitors or contractors attending the site to perform maintenance or other works.

The maximum fine for breaches of the Occupational Health & Safety Act has increased from \$40,000 to \$250,000 and the Government has introduced the crime of industrial manslaughter where gross negligence results in a workplace fatality.

Designers of buildings and building services also have a responsibility in ensuring that facilities are designed to be safe for future owners and occupiers.

What constitutes a safe environment?

Guidelines for safe workplaces are set out in various Codes of Practice and Guidance Notes available from the WorkCover Authority. Particular safety considerations relating to Contractors visiting buildings to carry out maintenance or other service tasks include:

- ❑ Access to roof mounted and suspended plant; safe hardstanding and adequate top alighting space for temporary ladders, permanent ladders to be compliant with Code, safely trafficable roof surfaces, guard rails or fall arrest systems for work to be carried out near a building edge or to restrict roof traffic to safe areas, plant platforms to be compliant with Code
- ❑ Use of Plant Spaces for other purposes including storage of goods precluding access or making access unsafe
- ❑ Security, plant areas to be secured to preclude tampering with equipment
- ❑ Protection of rotating plant such as vee-belt drives, shaft drives and exposed fans

- ❑ Electrical isolation to be compliant with relevant regulations and appropriately labeled.
- ❑ Ergonomic considerations to minimise likelihood of injury whilst carrying out maintenance tasks.
- ❑ Storage of Dangerous Goods in plant spaces where contractors could be exposed
- ❑ Signage of hazardous access issues including non trafficable roof areas, head height issues, confined space and excessive noise

Contractor's OH&S Procedures

Contracting organisations have a legal obligation to provide safe working conditions for their employees. To manage these risks most organisations have OH&S Policies and Procedures in place. Contractor's OH&S procedures will usually prohibit their staff going into unsafe environments until appropriate measures are in place. This may preclude maintenance and other activities being carried out.

Contractors working in unsafe situations put building owners and occupiers at risk of prosecution and litigation in case of accident.

Safe and ready access to plant facilitates effective maintenance and can result in lower costs.

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