Health, Safety and WorkSafe Alert

Falls from Heights
11 August 2011

As per the Department’s Working at Heights Procedure no DEECD employee is to work at a height of 2 metres or above unless their role specifically requires them to do so e.g. maintenance personnel that are required to clean gutters as per their job description.

Incident:

- A DEECD employee fell while climbing an aluminium extension ladder to access a second level roof to repair a leak.
- As a result of the fall the employee lost consciousness and sustained serious injuries including a fractured skull, fractured collar bone and cracked ribs.
- WorkSafe Victoria conducted an investigation of the incident and this was followed by an internal investigation by the Department’s Employee Health Unit (EHU).

Factors that Contributed to the Incident:

- The ladder was not secured to the gutter/facia and the base of the second level.
- Use of a domestic aluminium extension ladder– (rated to 100 kg) with a loose hook latch that was not suitable for the task.
- Failure to assess the risk associated with the task.
- Failure to develop and implement an appropriate Safe Work Procedure (SWP) for the task.

Recommendations:

- Schools should immediately review their local policies and procedures for tasks involving working at heights ensuring they comply with the Working at Heights Procedure in DEECD’s OHSMS.
- Schools should conduct a risk assessment using the Task Based Risk Management Form and document appropriate Safe Work Procedures (SWP) for tasks involving working at heights.
- Contractors who will be conducting work at 2 metres or above must complete a Permit to Work – Working at Heights and provide a
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relevant Safe Work Method Statement (SWMS) or equivalent documentation prior to work commencing.

Further Information:

- The Department’s Occupational Health and Safety Management System provides policies and procedures for managing OHS including:
  - OHS Risk Management;
  - Contractor Management;
  - OHS Hazard Management; and
  - Hazard, Incident reporting and Investigation using eduSafe.

For further assistance, contact your Regional OHS/WorkSafe Advisor or the Department’s DEECD OHS Advisory Service on 1300 074 715 or email safety@edumail.vic.gov.au.