



Regularly Inspect, Test, Repair or Replace

On the 10th of December 2015 Safework NSW published a media release with preliminary findings about why a window cleaner's cradle with 2 cleaners aboard fell 10 storeys from a Sydney CBD building and landed on the building awning. A similar, but fatal incident occurred in 2009.

Your workplace may not own a tall building, or engage employees or building maintenance/cleaning contractors to work in your building maintenance unit or to abseil down your building. However there are matters of interest for all workplaces in the incidents covered in this article.

Incident One

Incident One is the incident referred to in SafeWork NSW's preliminary findings in the first paragraph of this article. Two critical bolts in the cradle were weakened by significant fatigue cracking. While the cradle was being used the bolts suddenly broke without warning and the cradle fell 10 storeys. The two window cleaners were not killed but suffered serious injuries.

This equipment failure appears to indicate a violation of clause 37 of the WHS regulations. See our article entitled *Ensure Your Risk Controls Remain Effective*. One of the bullet points in that article recommended;

Regularly inspect and test plant and equipment. Repair or replace any that are damaged or worn.

Incident Two

SafeWork NSW tells us that in 2009 undetected metal fatigue cracks in a suspended scaffold caused it to break up during use and fall. One worker was killed and another worker suffered serious injuries.

It appears that both Incidents One and Two involved a failure to make a full safety inspection and take appropriate action.

Incident Three

Three window cleaners were working on a George St building using abseiling equipment in August 2015. One of them fell 3 storeys and landed on the bus shelter below. He survived but suffered serious injuries.

Incident Four

In December 2015 a window cleaner was cleaning windows using rope style equipment on a hotel in the Rocks. He fell 4 storeys onto a balcony and suffered serious injuries.

No details are available from SafeWork at this time about what caused Incidents Three and Four. But it does appear possible that the cause is in the area of a failure to;
Regularly inspect and test plant and equipment. Repair or replace any that are damaged or worn.

Conclusion

These incidents are a clear reminder that;

1. Any PCBU and its officers needs to take all appropriate steps to keep;

- its building maintenance units,
- anchors and static lines used as harness attachment points
- fixed guard rails, and
- fixed access ladders

safe for use by employees and all contractors.

2. Contractors need to take all appropriate steps to ensure their own equipment is always safe to use and that the workplace where they are working is a safe place to work.

3. Any PCBU using plant and equipment needs to;

Regularly inspect and test plant and equipment. Repair or replace any that are damaged or worn.

Note;

A useful website on the issues raised in this article is that of the Working at Heights Association Australia (WAHA) <http://www.waha.org.au/>