

SAFE WORK METHOD STATEMENT (SWMS)

Duty holders

A person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) carrying out any high risk work in connection with a construction project is required to have a detailed plan of work. A Safe Work Method Statement (SWMS) replaces a Job Safety Analysis (JSA) and references the legislative requirements outlined in Approved Codes of Practice and task specific training to high risk activities.

“High Risk “activities work classified Includes:

- Building Construction works (other than minor maintenance work);
- Civil Construction;
- Work at heights;
- Electrical work;
- Work near mobile plant items;
- Work near travelling vehicles (Roadside activities);
- Working near overhead or underground assets;
- Confined Space activities;
- Traffic Management;
- Work over or near water.

All duty holders involved in a high risk work activity must make sure:

- Ensure a safe work method statement (SWMS) is prepared before proposed work starts;
- Make arrangements to ensure that the high risk construction work is carried out in accordance with the SWMS;
- Ensure that a copy of the SWMS is given to the principal contractor before the work starts;
- Ensure that a SWMS is reviewed and revised if necessary;
- If the work is not carried out in accordance with the SWMS, the work is:
 - Stopped immediately or as soon as it is safe to do so;
 - Resumed in accordance with the statement.
- SWMSs are kept SWMS until the high risk construction work is completed and readily available for inspection.

Purpose of a safe work method statement (SWMS)

The primary purpose of a SWMS is to help supervisors, workers and any other persons at the workplace to understand the requirements that have been established to carry out the high risk construction work in a safe and healthy manner.

Both simple and complex activities can be broken down into a series of basic steps that will allow for full analysis of each part of the activity for hazards and potential incidents. The description of the process should not be so broad that it leaves out activities with the potential to cause incidents and prevents proper identification of the hazards nor is it necessary to go into fine detail of the tasks.

The aim of a SWMS is to:

- Describe the activity or task to be undertaken;
- Identify the resources, manpower and skills associated with the task;
- Sets out the work activities in logical sequences;
- Identifies hazards;
- Assess and select control measures (as appropriate);
- Systematically plan the activity so it can be completed efficiently and effectively.

The SWMS must be able to be easily read by those who need to know what has been planned to manage the risks and implement the control measures and ensure the work is being carried out in accordance with the SWMS.

This includes:

- The supervisor of the high risk construction work;
- The worker carrying out the high risk construction work;
- The principal contractor (if it is a construction project) or the person who has management and control over the high risk construction work.

What should be in a safe work method statement (SWMS)?

When preparing a SWMS the following must be taken into account:

- The circumstance at the workplace that may affect the way in which the high risk construction work is carried out;
- On a construction project, the Site Specific Safety Management Plan prepared by the principal contractor;
 - Identify the work that is high risk construction work;
 - Specify hazards relating to the high risk construction work and risks to health and safety associated with those hazards;
 - Describe the measures to be implemented to control the risks;
 - Describe how the control measures are to be implemented, monitored and reviewed.

A SWMS should also include the following information:

- The PCBU's name, address;
- Details of the person(s) responsible for ensuring implementation, monitoring and compliance with the SWMS;
- If the work is being carried out at a construction project:
 - The name of the principal contractor;
 - The address where the high risk construction work will be carried out;
 - The date the SWMS was prepared and the date it was provided to the principal contractor;
 - The review date (if any).

A SWMS may also include:

- The names of workers that have been consulted on the content of the SWMS;
- The date the consultation occurred;
- The signature of each worker acknowledging their participation in this consultation and the opportunity to discuss the proposed measures.

The content of a SWMS should provide clear direction on the control measures to be implemented. There should be no statements that require a decision to be made by supervisors or workers. For example, the statement '*use appropriate PPE*' does not detail the control measures. The control measures should be clearly specified.

Workers and their health and safety representatives should be consulted in the preparation of the SWMS. If there are no workers engaged at the planning stage, consultation should occur with workers when the SWMS is first made available to workers for example, during induction training, or when it is reviewed such as during workplace-specific training or a toolbox talk.

Preparing

A PCBU that carries out high risk construction work must ensure a SWMS is prepared or has already been prepared by another person before the proposed work commences.

If more than one PCBU is involved then each PCBU must, so far as is reasonably practicable, consult, cooperate and coordinate activities with all other PCBUs.

A PCBU (in consultation with workers who will be directly engaged in the high risk construction work) is best placed to prepare the SWMS because they understand the work being carried out and the workers undertaking the work and can ensure the SWMS is implemented, monitored and reviewed correctly.

There may be situations where there are different types of high risk construction work occurring at the same time at the same workplace.

Examples (These examples are indicative and provided as guidance only)

- Work is being carried out:
 - where there is a risk of a person falling more than 2m;
 - on a trench with an excavated depth greater than 1.5m.

If this is the case, it is possible for one SWMS to be prepared to cover all the high risk construction work being carried out at the workplace. Alternatively, a separate SWMS can be prepared for each type of high risk construction work. If separate SWMSs are prepared, thought must be given to how the different work activities may impact on each other and whether this may lead to inconsistencies between the various control measures.

- A contractor is engaged to work on a structure that is above two metres. Another contractor is engaged to carry out work using powered mobile plant such as a crane operation. Both contractors are required to prepare SWMS:
 - The first contractor must ensure a SWMS is prepared for the work that is being carried out above two metres;
 - The second contractor must ensure a SWMS is prepared for the work on the powered mobile plant.

In this case, the contractors may decide to prepare one SWMS to cover both types of high risk construction work or they may decide to prepare separate SWMSs. If separate SWMSs are being prepared, consultation, coordination and cooperation between the contractors must occur to the extent necessary to avoid inconsistencies. They must ensure each other is carrying the work out safely.

Generic safe work method statement (SWMS)

A generic SWMS may be prepared and used for work activities that are carried out on a regular basis. The content of this type of SWMS may be refined over a number of years and include consultation with workers and other PCBUs. Prior to each new activity, the SWMS must be reviewed and revised to ensure it applies to the high risk construction work and the actual workplace.

Compliance with safe work method statement (SWMS)

- All PCBUs who are involved in high risk construction work must develop and implement arrangements to ensure the work is carried out in accordance with the SWMS. These may include:
 - A system of routine or random workplace inspections (e.g. asking workers and supervisors a few questions about the control measures used in the SWMS to see if they understand what has to be done).
- If the work is not being carried out in accordance with the SWMS;
 - The work must stop immediately or as soon as it is safe to do so;
 - Work must not resume until the work can be carried out in accordance with the SWMS.
- If work is stopped, the work and the SWMS should be reviewed to identify non-compliance and ensure the method in the SWMS is the most practical and safest way of doing the task;
 - The SWMS should be revised if another method is identified as being a safer option, before work resumes.
- A PCBU must not commence high risk construction work unless the principal contractor has been provided a copy of the SWMS:
 - If the principal contractor is not aware of the content of the SWMS then they will not be able to comply with their duties;
 - The principal contractor must ensure that the PCBU does not commence high risk construction work until they have been provided a copy of the SWMS.

Providing information and instruction

A PCBU must ensure that all workers who will be involved in high risk construction work are provided with information and instruction so they:

- Understand the hazards and the risks arising from the work;
- Understand and implement the risk controls in a SWMS;
- Know what to do if the work is not being conducted in accordance with the SWMS.

For example, this information and instruction may be provided during induction training, workplace-specific or during a toolbox talk by principal contractor, contractor or subcontractor.

Safe work method statement (SWMS) must be kept

The SWMS must be kept and be available for inspection until at least the high risk construction work is completed. Where a SWMS is revised, all versions should be kept.

If a notifiable incident occurs in relation to high risk construction work to which the SWMS relates, then the SWMS must be available to support the investigation.

Location of a safe work method statement (SWMS)

The SWMS may be kept at the workplace where the high risk construction work will be carried out. If this is not possible, then the SWMS should be kept at a location where it can be delivered to the workplace promptly.

A PCBU must ensure the SWMS is available:

- To any person engaged to carry out the high risk construction work;
- For inspection by the principal contractor or WorkSafe inspector.

Review of safe work method statement

A SWMS must be reviewed regularly to make sure it remains effective. A SWMS must be reviewed (and revised if necessary) if relevant control measures are revised.

The review process should be carried out in consultation with workers (including contractors and subcontractors) who may be affected by the operation of the SWMS and their health and safety representatives who represented that work group at the workplace.

When a SWMS has been revised the PCBU must ensure:

- All persons involved with the high risk construction work are advised that a revision has been made and how they can access the revised SWMS. For a construction project, the principal contractor should be given a copy of the revised SWMS;
- All persons who will need to change a work procedure or system as a result of the review are advised of the changes in a way that will enable them to implement their duties consistently with the revised SWMS;
- All workers that will be involved in the high risk construction work are provided with the relevant information and instruction that will assist them to understand and implement the revised SWMS.