

Working safe a priority

Construction is a dynamic and high-risk work environment. WorkSafe New Zealand is stepping up to promote good workplace health and safety practices across the country but particularly in Canterbury for the rebuild.

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WorkSafe inspectors are assessing work across all areas of the rebuild.

THERE IS A GROWING awareness of safety across the Canterbury rebuild, with both leaders and workers across the region embracing a commitment to health and safety.

As the rebuild gains momentum, however, pressure is increasing on time and resources, with longer hours being worked and an influx of new and young workers. This all increases the risk of workplace injury.

To manage this risk, strong safety leadership will be needed at all levels of organisations, and robust risk awareness, effective training and supervision maintained.

Rebuild Safety Charter pivotal

The rebuild community in Canterbury has made a strong commitment to preventing harm through signing the Canterbury

Rebuild Safety Charter. This is a statement of intent to raise the standard of safety across construction and leave a lasting legacy. It includes an aspirational and practical set of goals developed and promoted by the industry.

WorkSafe supporting and inspecting

WorkSafe New Zealand supports and resources the work of industry to develop and promote the Rebuild Safety Charter and is also building its own inspectorate capacity and capability.

It has entered into a 2-year memorandum of understanding with WorkCover NSW, the health and safety regulator in New South Wales, Australia, to train and warrant experienced construction inspectors to complement its own inspectorate team.

Visiting Australian inspectors have been impressed by the dedication many organisations have shown towards improving safety standards in the Canterbury rebuild, particularly in the residential housing industry. They say they've noticed an improvement since their visits commenced in November 2013.

Critical risks associated with the rebuild

WorkSafe has identified some critical risk areas that its inspectorate team is focusing on, including mobile plant, excavation work, falls from height and asbestos.

Asbestos

Any building constructed, altered or refurbished between approximately 1940 and 1990 is likely to contain asbestos. Early and accurate identification of these materials is the critical first step in managing it safely.

WorkSafe has released a series of asbestos fact sheets online for employers, workers, and everyone in the industry to access.

Excavations

Tragically, a Matamata man lost his life in May while working on a pipe join in a trench. Excavations of any sort can be deadly, and WorkSafe provides clear guidelines on how to construct and frame them.

Confined spaces

Risks associated with confined spaces are also a focus. These are areas not intended for human

occupancy, with limited access or the potential to contain an unsuitable atmosphere.

These areas can be extremely hazardous or pose multiple risks, such as toxic gas build-up, flammable or explosive atmospheres, risk of engulfment from water or materials, lack of structural integrity or restricted egress.

Breaches liable to a fine

The WorkSafe inspectorate undertakes planned, proactive assessments across all areas of the rebuild focusing on areas of critical risk.

A range of intelligence is used to target visits including information from other agencies, complaints, serious harm incident reports and hazardous work notifications.

If the inspectors observe breaches that constitute an immediate risk to safety, a prohibition notice may be issued to stop the work activity, piece of plant or machine.

If the problem can be rectified immediately, a written warning may be provided. If the immediate risk has been addressed, an improvement notice may be issued to ensure that processes and procedures are rectified in a more sustained way.

An infringement fine can be issued for repeated failures, and there is the potential for prosecution for further repeated or very serious breaches.

Free safety sessions

WorkSafe also holds free, regular trade breakfasts and conferences on critical risk areas for construction workers and managers.

Since August 2013, over 2,200 people have attended events on asbestos, falls from height, mobile plant and excavations. The most recent construction event covered fatigue and impairment. ◀

For more Visit www.business.govt.nz/worksafe/.

WorkSafe

WorkSafe New Zealand began operation as New Zealand's workplace health and safety regulator in December 2013.

It was established as a stand-alone agency by government in direct response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Pike River Coal Mine Tragedy in 2012 and the Independent Taskforce on Workplace Health and Safety in 2013.

WorkSafe's focus is to embed and promote good workplace health and safety practices. Its functions include those previously carried out by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) and, earlier, the Department of Labour. ◀