



Project: Upgrading rooftop safety at Fairfield City Council

Solution: Textbook approach to fall prevention and rooftop access

AROUND 80 of Fairfield City Council's 250 buildings in suburban Sydney are frequently accessed by air-conditioning contractors and council plumbers. Until a review was carried out, says facilities manager Guna Gunachandran, those workers were given little guidance on working safely at heights: "Before, we left it up to each individual employee and contractor to decide whether they felt it was safe to work on the roof. There was no consistent approach and employees and contractors usually just decided it was safe enough.

"The NSW government and OHS Regulations 2001 made us think about creating a uniform and consistent approach. The council also wanted to provide a good, safe working environment for employees and contractors."

OHS lawyer and author, Michael Tooma of Deacons, said there were specific controls governing working at heights: "Across the board you've got obligations to identify, assess and control risks in the workplace. In relation to fall prevention, across the country there are express obligations to deal with the risk of a fall at a workplace, working at heights.

These obligations require you to identify the risk of a fall from heights, assess the risk of a fall from height and control those risks in a prescribed manner. That manner is the hierarchy of controls and in relation to fall prevention requires you to look at barriers, redesigning the rooftop as a primary control before you even look at what everyone else looks at first, which is a harness. The hierarchy gives you more permanent controls."

To address the risks and manage liability, Fairfield City Council was determined to implement best practice controls.

"The first company we consulted with was pushing roof anchors which, for us, were the last choice," Gunachandran said. "Roof anchors are very cumbersome compared to other options and we would have to train the staff to use them properly. Staff members were reluctant too. There was also no way for us to assess whether staff or contractors would even use the roof anchors. Anyone can sign a document that says



The controller of a workplace must ensure contractors take precautions.

you're using safe practices, but we want them to actually do it. If I were to climb onto the roof, I would rather not bother putting on a harness – I would prefer another system, even if it cost more."

The council engaged Workplace Access & Safety to audit its buildings. Managing director Carl Sachs said the audit's recommendations balanced ongoing expenses with up-front capital costs: "Static lines, anchors and harnesses have their place in the hierarchy of controls but they come with a whole host of other requirements, like training, permit and induction requirements, annual inspections, personal protective equipment

(PPE) requirements and rescue procedures.

"Often, this isn't disclosed at the time of sale and organisations aren't geared up to maintain the controls for these systems. The client needs to understand the legislation and budget for 10 years of ongoing maintenance, administration and training costs.

Based on the recommendations, Council provided a five-year fall prevention installation budget, with priority placed on high-risk areas identified by Workplace Access & Safety.

"During the risk assessment process, we rated areas as high, medium and low using a risk management process," Sachs states. "We recommended they put a hold on any

maintenance on high-risk facilities until rectification works were completed and this was done. If getting work done on a high-risk building becomes absolutely necessary, then that particular site will become a priority. The important thing is that Council has stopped the contractors assessing the higher risk buildings and therefore reduced its exposure.”

Gunachandran said just one year into the five-year program the results had already been impressive: “So far, the feedback from the staff is very positive, especially with our building trade staff because they are the ones using the safety measures. They are happy because the council is looking after their safety and we are happy because the council will now become compliant with OHS regulation 2001.

Workplace Access & Safety
www.workplaceaccess.com.au



Like to know more about fall prevention?



Height safety specialists, Workplace Access & Safety offers training, audits and installs all the equipment needed to make your workplace comply with Australian Standards and state regulations.

Fax your details to 1300 551 612 to find out how your workplace can be made safe

- Please have a fall prevention professional phone me immediately
- Please contact me via email
- Please send me information about fall prevention

Name: _____

Company: _____

Phone number: _____

Address: _____

State: _____

Postcode: _____

Email: _____

Workplace Access & Safety – the fall prevention specialists
Phone: 1300 552 984
www.workplaceaccess.com.au