

FACT SHEET

Safe use of plasterers' stilts in construction

Purpose

This guidance provides health and safety information to persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs), including builders, plastering contractors, employers and workers using stilts at construction workplaces.

This guidance replaces the position paper *Plasterers' stilts in the construction industry* (catalogue no. WC02032), which maintained a zero tolerance approach to the use of plasterers' stilts in the construction industry.

Requirements

Section 19 of the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (WHS Act) requires a PCBU to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of workers.

Before using stilts, identify, assess and control the risks relating to the work area layout, work area condition, the work activity to be undertaken and the tools and equipment that will be used. Once this is completed, then develop, through worker consultation, safe work procedures. Implement and monitor the risk controls and, in particular, ensure that only a competent person uses stilts.

Risks when using stilts

The use of stilts by plasterers to gain access to ceilings, high walls and other areas poses the following risks.

- Losing one's balance and falling to the ground through, for example, a window or over handrails, which are usually only a metre high.
- Tripping over debris, materials or tools on the floor, or falling on slippery surfaces.
- Falling over while entering a different level or going through doorways.
- Manual handling injuries caused by bending over or twisting from the stilts.

Actions required

1. Work area layout

Identify all potential stilts hazards such as: changes in the level or slope of the work area; guardrails that are next to edges, walls, doors or ceiling features (eg arches, lights, bulkheads), which may restrict movement when using stilts; floor penetrations, stairwells, voids, windows and in-built furniture.

2. Work area condition

Do not use stilts:

- Where the ceiling height is greater than three metres.
- For walking on stairs and walking backwards.
- Until the work area is 'plaster ready', which means:
 - Floor surfaces are solid, level and can support stilt work activity (eg earthen floors have been concreted). Do not use on a non-floor surface (such as tables, trestles, etc).

- Floor surfaces have been cleared, swept and dry. Stilt workers need to move freely and without stepping over or moving around trip hazards, such as leads to work lights, hoses, packaging or dropped items (nails, screws, etc).
- Plumbing and electrical work has been roughed in with switch positions and access points marked and lighting cables secured.
- Floor penetrations, stairwells and voids are covered or guarded in such a way that they can be clearly seen by stilt workers. (**Note:** guardrails effective at normal working heights are unlikely to be effective for stilt workers, especially if the work is being done near a balcony or stairs.)
- Furniture is removed and in-built furniture, such as kitchen cupboards or architectural features, is isolated or highlighted. Do not step into or over baths or other obstructions.

3. Work activity

Do not commence work before risk control measures ensure that:

- Stilts are only to be used for light duty tasks such as the placing of insulation batts, installing furring channels, screwing sheets to furring channels, installing trusses and the undersides of floor joists and walls, patching, touching up and the stopping of joints using a trowel, fixing cornices and minor hand sanding. Only portable hand held tools (without leads) such as a trowel, hammer, sanding block and cordless screw gun are to be used by stilt workers.
- There is a safe means of attaching and removing stilts readily available. A rigid platform should be used for mounting /dismounting stilts with the platform at a height equal to or greater than the height of the stilts. Stepladders are not to be used for mounting/dismounting stilts. Stepping up and balancing on one stilt then bending to fit the second is also not acceptable.
- All equipment and materials required by a stilt worker should be supported by a purpose-built stand (mobile or stationary) that enables the stilt worker to access them without over-reaching or bending down below knee level. The height of the stand should be appropriate for the task being performed. Alternatively, tools and materials can be passed up to the stilt worker by another person standing on the floor. Do not pick up items from below knee level.
- The stilt worker's torso should be vertical whenever possible, so tasks that require frequent bending should be avoided. Also do not jump with the stilts.
- The handling of long, heavy or cumbersome objects or items, such as decorative cornices and the lifting or supporting of plaster sheets should be avoided.
- Other workers cannot affect the immediate work area being used by stilt workers, unless they are working as support for the stilt worker. (If this cannot be guaranteed, the work area should be taped off or barricaded to prevent access.)
- Any waste produced and material dropped by stilt workers is promptly cleared away (by an assistant) from the floor surface they are working on.
- Emergency procedures detail how stilt workers are to evacuate.
- Supervisors should regularly check that stilt workers are not experiencing fatigue. If stilt workers begin to experience fatigue, they should **immediately** remove their stilts.
 - Any one period of working on stilts should be not greater than two hours. Any further sessions should be separated by at least thirty minutes of non-stilt tasks. Stilts should not be used by any individual for more than six hours per day.
- The springs are not fully compressed (caused when lifting heavy objects or exerting high upward force, such as drilling through overhead structures).

4. Maintenance of tools and equipment

Only proprietary stilts can be used. Do not use any stilts that are not from a reputable manufacturer. Follow manufacturer's recommendations for maintenance and inspections.

- All tools and equipment including stilt and their components must be examined regularly and any worn or damaged components replaced immediately. They also must be stored, serviced and maintained by a competent person as per the manufacturer's specifications.
- A competent person must inspect the stilts before each use. If defects are detected, repair it as per the manufacturer's instructions before further use or, if this is not possible, destroy it to prevent further use.

5. Competency of workers

Workers must be competent. **Stilts must not be used without proper training and workers must have experience in their use.** Manufacturer's instructions on their correct use must be followed at all times.

Trainees should be made aware of:

- How the foot and ankle action changes when wearing stilts.
- Training should also include information on:
 - work environment hazards
 - how to correctly adjust stilts so as to reduce fatigue and poor posture
 - the injuries that can occur from their unsafe use.

The stilt worker should gain experience and confidence before working and also before undertaking work activities such as working with their head up, using tools in both hands or working at maximum height.



Correct use of stilts: A light duty task being conducted on a clean floor.



Inappropriate activity whilst on stilts: Reaching below foot level stresses the knee, ankle, back and stilts.



Inappropriate environment for working on stilts: Working in garage with earth floor and poor housekeeping.

Further information

- Suitability of worksite for stilt use – supervisor checklist
- Codes of practice and guidance material are available at workcover.nsw.gov.au or call the WorkCover Information Service on 13 10 50.

Suitability of worksite for stilt use – supervisor checklist

Completed by:	Date:
Location:	
Activity/task:	

Checking that the site is 'plaster ready'	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Floor surfaces are solid and level (eg concreted or lined).	
Floor surfaces are cleared, swept and dry.	
Lighting cables (from ceilings and walls) are secured.	
Electric leads – including those to working lights – are clear of the work area.	
VOIDS (eg stairwells) and windows that may be hazardous are guarded for stilt work.	
Floor penetrations (eg pipes) covered and/or highlighted.	
Plastering works are the only works underway in the immediate work area.	
Any other workers (besides workers assisting the stilt worker in their task) are excluded from the work areas by barricading/taping off.	

Checking that the task is suitable for stilts	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
The tasks to be completed are light duty tasks.	
The task can be completed without the stilt worker bending down below knee level.	
The task can be completed without the stilt worker overreaching sideways.	
Equipment and materials are accessible to the stilt worker without bending down or overreaching.	
The task on stilts will take less than two hours (or the task can be broken into two hour blocks) with no more than six hours wearing stilts per day.	
Ceiling heights are no greater than three metres.	
The proposed activity and movement is permitted by the manufacturer's instruction manual.	
Tools to be used while on stilts are appropriate and compatible.	

Preparation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Identification of hazardous manual handling has been completed.	
Manual handling risk controls implemented.	
Safe operating procedure has been completed.	
Stilt workers are competent and have received training in the correct use of stilts.	
The stilts are supplied from a recognised industry supplier, have been visually checked prior to mounting, are in good condition and have been maintained in accordance with the supplier's instructions.	
Stilt workers are not tired and are physically capable of performing the assigned task.	
There is a suitable, rigid mounting/dismounting platform (a step ladder is unsuitable).	
Emergency evacuation procedures consider stilt workers.	
Steps have been taken for waste material produced during the plastering process to be promptly cleared away.	

Disclaimer

This publication may contain work health and safety and workers compensation information. It may include some of your obligations under the various legislations that WorkCover NSW administers. To ensure you comply with your legal obligations you must refer to the appropriate legislation.

Information on the latest laws can be checked by visiting the NSW legislation website legislation.nsw.gov.au

This publication does not represent a comprehensive statement of the law as it applies to particular problems or to individuals or as a substitute for legal advice. You should seek independent legal advice if you need assistance on the application of the law to your situation.

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