



Communiqué to the construction industry

On-site inspection of scaffolding components is critical to safety

29 July 2005

WorkSafe has recently been requested to intervene on several construction sites to advise on appropriate measures to ensure the ongoing serviceability of components during their repeated re-use whilst on site to construct scaffolds.

This communiqué is intended to assist industry and reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings and disputes by clarifying the responsibilities of scaffolding suppliers, scaffolders and principal contractors.

Suppliers of scaffolding components have obligations under OHS law to take all reasonably practicable measures to ensure that, upon delivery to a site, they are serviceable. Thorough inspection regimes and between-hiring inspection and maintenance procedures should ensure the serviceability of the components when supplied.

It is common, particularly on large projects, for components to remain on site for long periods, during which time they are frequently re-used. Consequently, a component that may have been serviceable when it arrived on site may subsequently deteriorate to the point where it becomes unserviceable during the course of its re-use on that site.

The re-usable nature of scaffolding components

Scaffolding components are designed and intended to be repeatedly re-used to construct scaffolds. The serviceable life of a scaffolding component will depend upon several factors, including:

- the frequency of its re-use,
- the degree of care taken by scaffolders in raising, fixing, dismantling and lowering it,
- the actual conditions of use of the scaffolds it is used in,
- the environments it is used in,
- the quality of corrosion prevention of the component, and
- the degree to which it is serviced, maintained and adequately stored between uses.

Eventual deterioration of a scaffolding component through repeated re-use is inevitable. Therefore, the visual inspection of every scaffolding component **before** it is used in a scaffold is essential.

Competency requirements for certificated scaffolders

Scaffolders' certification is based on the competencies set out in Schedule A of the *National OHS Certification Standard for Users and Operators of Industrial Equipment* [NOHSC: 1006, 3rd edition, 2001]. In particular, it specifies that the certificated scaffolder must have the knowledge and skill to inspect components, and to label and reject damaged components. [See Clause 1.2 of Schedule A of NOHSC: 1006] Victoria's **Occupational Health and Safety (Certification of Plant Users and Operators) Regulations 1994** incorporate this National Standard.

Similarly, AS/NZS 4576, *Guidelines for Scaffolding*, states:

"In order for scaffolding to be erected, altered and dismantled correctly, safely and efficiently, scaffolders must... visually inspect scaffolding equipment for faults."
[Clause 2.1]

AS/NZS 4576 also advises how components identified as no longer suitable for use are to be dealt with:

“Rejected scaffolding equipment should be isolated by clear marking or tagging, or placing in containers or areas that are clearly designated for the storage of rejected equipment.” [Clause 7.2]

AS/NZS 4576 forms part of WorkSafe’s *Code of Practice for Plant*, which provides recommended advice on how to achieve compliance with Victoria’s **Occupational Health and Safety (Plant) Regulations 1995**.

Dealing with rejected components

Once faulty or unserviceable components have been isolated, AS/NZS 4576 advises that they be treated in one of the following ways:

“Repaired (e.g. replacing bolts on couplers, replacing missing wedges on modular scaffolding, re-binding ends of timber planks, appropriate re-welding).

Reduced in length (e.g. shortening of tube, planks or wire rope to remove defective ends).

Downgraded (e.g. downgrading a scaffold plank for use as a soleplate, provided the fault does not adversely affect the performance of the soleplate).

Scrapped.” [Clause 7.2]

Rejected components should be returned to the supplier where a decision is made by the supplier to repair or scrap the components. If a rejected component can be repaired, the supplier shall make the repair in accordance with sound engineering principles. The repair work shall be undertaken by a suitably qualified person.

If it is obvious that rejected components were in an unserviceable state at the time they were hired or purchased, the principal contractor should promptly take the matter up with the supplier.

Full stillages or full loads of components should not be rejected based on a few components being rejected as not fit for use.

When to involve WorkSafe

Contact WorkSafe’s Advisory Service on 1800 136 089 if you have concerns that:

- a scaffolding supplier is failing to take reasonable steps to ensure the serviceability of components at the time of supply, or
- a principal contractor, employer or self-employed person is failing to ensure that certificated scaffolders are responsible for the erection, alteration and dismantling of any scaffold from which a person or object could fall more than 4 metres, or
- a certificated scaffolder is failing to adequately inspect components before incorporating them into scaffolds, or failing to adequately isolate rejected components to prevent their inadvertent re-use.

WorkSafe will take the appropriate compliance and enforcement action where its investigations indicate such breaches.



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