

Working at Heights Procedure

Section 1 - Preamble

(1) Charles Darwin University ('the University', 'CDU') is committed to ensuring the safety of any person who works with a risk of falling at any University work location or while engaged in any University activity.

Section 2 - Purpose

(2) This document outlines the University's process for managing potential exposure to a risk of falling due to hazards associated with work being undertaken. This policy and procedure aims to ensure safe use of plant and equipment when working at heights, in compliance with Australian Standards:

- a. AS/NZS 1576 Scaffolding series;
- b. AS/NZS 1891 Industrial fall-arrest systems and devices;
- c. AS/NZS 1892 Portable ladders series AS/NZS 4576; and
- d. Guidelines for scaffolding.

(3) Working at heights means working in a place or undertaking an activity where a person could fall from a height of two metres or more. Some examples include:

- a. any plant or structure being constructed, demolished, inspected, or repaired;
- b. off the ground (e.g. up ladders, on work platforms, in trees, up masts or towers);
- c. near an unprotected open edge or near a hole, shaft or pit into which a person could fall;
- d. fragile or potentially unstable surface;
- e. using equipment to gain access to an elevated level; or
- f. a sloping or slippery surface.

Section 3 - Scope

(4) This procedure applies to any person who is exposed to a risk of falling from a height at a University work location or while engaged in University activity/ies.

(5) Fall means a fall by a person from one level to another.

Section 4 - Procedure

Responsibilities

(6) Pro Vice-Chancellors, Directors of Operational Departments, Managers and Supervisors are responsible for ensuring:

- a. resources are available within their area to assist with the implementation of this procedure;
- b. the procedure is implemented in their area;
- c. all ladders in their area are inspected a minimum of once every 12 months;
- d. records of inspections and a register of ladder maintenance are maintained in the same location where the ladder is stored;
- e. all equipment, such as harnesses, lanyards, ropes and fall restraint devices are inspected and maintained in accordance with AS/NZS1891 Industrial fall-arrest systems and devices (AS/NZS 1891); and
- f. records of inspections and maintenance of all equipment are maintained and kept with the equipment

(7) Property and Facilities (PF) is responsible for ensuring:

- a. implementing this procedure in their area of responsibility and accountability;
- b. evaluating contractor's competency to work at heights;
- c. ensuring relevant PF employees, contract supervisors, and authorised contractors carry out work at heights in accordance with these procedures;
- d. ensuring adequate resources are available to comply with the requirements of this procedure;
- e. keeping and maintaining records of all [Safe Work Method Statements](#), risk assessments, rescue plans and training and competency records for two years or longer if required;
- f. Anchorages are inspected and maintained in accordance with AS/NZS1891; and
- g. A [Safe Work Method Statement](#) is completed for all roof activities.

(8) Authorised contractors are responsible for:

- a. providing the University with evidence that their staff, including sub-contractors, have completed the Nationally Accredited Training and competency assessment for working at heights prior to the commencement of work;
- b. ensuring a rescue plan is developed, rehearsed, and all required equipment is on site. Copies of these documents are to be forwarded to the relevant Campus Facilities Manager before the work is carried out;
- c. ensuring a risk assessment is completed and, where required, a roof access permit is completed, and that copies of these documents are forwarded to the relevant Campus Facilities Manager prior to the work being carried out;
- d. ensuring a written authority to carry out work is obtained from PF prior to carrying out the work;
- e. on completion of work, ensuring all equipment is removed or secured; and
- f. communicating safety requirements and ensuring staff or subcontractors understand and comply.

(9) All persons working at heights on University campuses and field locations are responsible for:

- a. cooperating with WHS procedures in relation to the work they undertake;
- b. performing work at heights in accordance with this procedure and any information, training or instruction they have received;
- c. inspecting all equipment before and after each use;
- d. using equipment which is suitable for the job; and
- e. identifying and mitigating any hazards, assessment and control of the risk involved.

Training and Competency

(10) All persons who are required to work at height using passive fall prevention devices must hold a certificate of competency from a nationally accredited Registered training organisation (RTO) in fall protection.

(11) The training given must cover, at least:

- a. the method to be used in carrying out the specified work task. This should include access and the attachment method;
- b. the correct use, care and storage of individual fall protection equipment;
- c. inspection and maintenance of fall protection equipment and recording information; and
- d. The procedure to be adopted in the event of an accident or injury (e.g. rescue and recovery).

(12) It is highly recommended that supervisors of persons who work at heights also complete relevant training. Other training requirements may be identified through risk assessments, safe work procedures, roof access permits, etc.

(13) Passive fall prevention device means a passive fall prevention device, its materials, or equipment, or a combination thereof that is designed for preventing falls and, after initial installation, does not require any ongoing adjustment, alteration or operation by any person to ensure the device's integrity. Examples include:

- a. elevated work platforms: fixed work platforms, cherry pickers, step platforms, building maintenance units;
- b. scaffolding;
- c. guard railing (protective barrier attached directly to a building, scaffold or other structure by posts);
- d. safety mesh; or
- e. special forklifts such as order-picking forklifts or purlin trolleys.

Planning

(14) The risk assessment process outlined in the University's [Hazard Identification, Risk Assessment and Control Procedure](#) must be followed, and an Activity Risk Assessment must be completed before any activity or task commences where there is a fall risk.

(15) During the planning process for any activity working at heights, consideration must be given to the following legislative requirements:

- a. where possible, the work is carried out on the ground or on a solid construction;
- b. a safe means of access to and exit from the workplace must be provided; and
- c. the risk of falls has been minimised so far as is reasonably practicable by providing a fall prevention device, work positioning system or a fall arrest harness.

(16) Fall arrest harness means an assembly of interconnected shoulder and leg straps, with or without a body belt, that complies with AS/NZS 1891, which is designed to distribute forces to minimise the likelihood of injury resulting from an arrested fall, and to prevent the wearer from falling out of the assembly of straps. It consists of a full-body harness (parachute type).

(17) Risk assessments and controls that have been implemented should be regularly reviewed to ensure:

- a. they remain appropriate for the type of risk; and
- b. that they remain effective in minimising the risk.

Working at Height Rescue Plan

(18) Before the commencement of any work at heights, consideration should be given to developing a rescue plan. If a fall arrest system is being utilised, Emergency and Rescue Procedures need to be developed. Persons conducting the work shall be involved in developing the rescue plan and shall ensure they are aware of potential areas of concern. This shall be referred to in the Safe Work Method Statement or Activity Risk Assessment and included in the Work Pack. A generic rescue plan can be used, provided there are no unique circumstances that would require modification of the plan.

(19) As a minimum, the rescue plan should include:

- a. method to be employed for rescue from heights;
- b. identification of emergency response resources, competent persons and equipment (which must be readily available). In situations where complex rescue processes may be required, it may be necessary to advise rescue services prior to and at the completion of the work;
- c. the identification of Access/Egress points to be used in the event of an emergency evacuation;
- d. communications (tested and proven prior to work commencing); and
- e. information for reducing the potential for suspension trauma of a person.

(20) Recovery of persons from heights shall only be undertaken by competent persons. A rescue can only be carried out if it is safe to do so and will not place the rescuer or others at risk of injury.

Working on Roofs

(21) Any person who is required to access a University roof is to follow the process outlined in their Safe Work Method Statement.

University Off-Campus Activities

(22) University fieldwork, events and activities that require working at heights require planning and a risk assessment of the environment for hazards, and appropriate action to be taken to mitigate the risk of falling in accordance with this procedure.

Fall Prevention

(23) Working on the ground or on solid construction effectively eliminates the risk of falls. For example, a roof may be prefabricated at ground level, a spreader may be used to cover loads on trucks from the ground or shelving height may be reduced from ground level.

(24) Working on solid construction can provide an environment where the likelihood of a fall can be eliminated. Examples include structural strength, barriers, protection of openings and holes, surface and gradient, and entry and exit.

Elevated Work Platforms (EWPs)

(25) Elevated Work Platform (EWP) means a telescoping device, hinged device or articulated device, or any combination of these devices, which is used to support a platform on which personnel, equipment and materials can be elevated to perform work.

(26) Every person who operates an EWP must have a High Risk Work Licence and be trained in safe operating procedures, fall-arrest safety and emergency rescue procedures. Every person in the 'basket' must be secured with suitable fall restraint equipment, and there must be systems in place to prevent tools and equipment from falling from the basket. This shall also apply when moving any EWP (inclusive of loading and unloading an EWP from a transport vehicle), whether elevated or not.

(27) Fall restraint means a type of fall protection with a fixed-length lanyard that keeps a worker's centre of gravity from reaching a fall hazard.

(28) An observer/spotter must be available for personnel working on EWPs to provide additional guidance during moving operations and ensure that persons can readily respond in an emergency.

(29) Fall protection using a harness and lanyard is mandatory when working in an EWP, including booms and scissor

lifts.

(30) EWPs are only used as working platforms and not as a means of entering and exiting a work area.

(31) Unless designed for rough terrain, platforms are used only on a solid, level surface. The surface area is checked to confirm there are no penetrations or obstructions that could cause uncontrolled movement or the platform to overturn. Inspection and maintenance of the EWP equipment comply with the relevant statutory requirements and standards.

(32) Smoking is prohibited when in the basket of any type of EWP.

(33) Passive fall prevention devices must be used to help prevent a fall during temporary work at heights.

Anchor Points

(34) All fixed or permanent structural anchorage points shall be certified by a competent person and shall be non-destructive proof tested after installation in accordance with manufacturer specifications, or where manufacturer specifications are absent, in accordance with Australian Standard 1891. Installation and NDT testing documentation, including the Engineer's certificate, shall be maintained by Property and Facilities (PF).

(35) Friction and grouted anchorages shall be certified by a competent person and proof-loaded to 50% of the design ultimate strength in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions after installation and prior to their initial use. Temporary anchorages shall be installed in accordance with the manufacturer's or designer's instructions and shall be inspected by an approved competent person prior to use.

(36) Anchorage means a secure attachment on a structure or plant to which a fall arrest device, lanyard assembly or restraint line or lifeline can be attached.

Edge Protection

(37) Where a person is at risk of falling, edge protection shall be provided, in compliance with AS 1657 or AS/NZS 1576.

(38) Edge protection means a structural system, which may comprise posts, rails, infill panels, mesh, toe boards and/or a combination thereof that is designed to prevent people and/or objects from falling over an exposed edge.

Industrial Rope Access Systems

(39) In the case of utilisation of industrial rope access systems, both the user and the supervisor shall be competent persons. Examples of work positioning systems include industrial rope access systems and restraint systems.

(40) Restraint systems mean a system to prevent falling from height. This can include approved rails, guarding, static lines, anchor points, fixed-length lines and harnesses. All systems should meet the requirements of relevant Australian Standards.

(41) Although fall arrest components are used in the industrial rope access system, the main purpose of the system is to gain access to a work area rather than to provide backup fall protection.

(42) Other methods of accessing a workface should be considered (for example, EWPs or building maintenance units) before rope access systems, as a high level of skill is needed for their safe use.

Restraint Technique

(43) The use of a restraint technique is the University's preferred method of fall prevention. A restraint technique controls a person's movement by physically preventing the person from reaching a position where there is a risk of a fall. It consists of a harness connected by a lanyard to an anchorage or horizontal lifeline. It must be set up to prevent the wearer from reaching an unprotected edge.

Fall Arrest Systems

(44) Fall arrest means the support of a person after a fall from heights has occurred, to prevent the person from striking the ground. Examples of fall arrest systems include:

- a. catch platforms;
- b. industrial safety nets;
- c. individual fall-arrest systems; or
- d. anchorage lines or rails.

(45) All equipment used for fall arrest should be selected, used and maintained in compliance with AS1891 1891 Industrial fall-arrest systems and devices—Selection, Use and Maintenance.

(46) A fall arrest system should only be used if it is not reasonably practicable to use higher-level controls, or in conjunction with higher-level controls. Where a fall arrest device is used, all anchorage points for the device must be inspected before first use and regularly thereafter. This inspection must be conducted by a competent person.

(47) Where the load-bearing capacity of anchor points is impaired, the anchor point must not be used. Only suitable equipment, such as a harness, safety line and other components, shall be used in fall arrest systems.

(48) Only a competent person shall use fall arrest equipment. Where a fall arrest system is in use, an appropriate Working at Heights Rescue Plan must be in place in the event of a fall.

Arrested Fall

(49) Suspension intolerance can occur when a person experiences an arrested fall and remains suspended in an upright, vertical position. Individuals suspended in a harness must be rescued as quickly as practicable to prevent serious health risks. To reduce the risk of suspension intolerance following an arrested fall:

- a. never work alone when using a harness for fall protection;
- b. use a harness that supports horizontal leg positioning and carry straps to provide footholds; and
- c. ensure rescue occurs swiftly, ideally within five minutes of the fall.

(50) Workers must avoid putting themselves at risk while assisting others.

Ladders

(51) Working from portable ladders greatly increases the chances of falling compared to other methods of working at heights. Portable ladders should comply with the requirements of the relevant Australian Standard:

- a. AS/NZS 1892.1:1996 Portable ladders Part 1: Metal;
- b. AS 1892.2:1992 Portable ladders Part 2: Timber; and
- c. AS/NZS 1892.5:2020 Portable Ladders - Selection, safe use and care.

(52) Alternate passive fall prevention devices are to be considered. Ladders are only to be used for:

- a. minor tasks;
- b. short periods of time; and
- c. as a means of access and egress

(53) Ladders are not to be used for:

- a. any work that places the user at additional risk; or
- b. any work where the user is higher than 3 meters from the ground. For heights above 3 metres, ladders are to be used only for access and egress.

(54) Further information in relation to portable ladder use can be found at [NT WorkSafe - Portable Ladder Safety](#).

Scaffolding (Temporary Work Platforms)

(55) Scaffolds must be used and managed to effectively prevent falls when working at height.

(56) All scaffolds must comply with WHS Regulations and relevant Australian Standards (e.g. AS/NZS 1576 and AS/NZS 4576).

(57) A scaffold must not be used where a fall risk exceeds 4 meters unless a competent person has inspected it and provided written confirmation that it is complete.

(58) The scaffold and its supporting structure must be inspected by a competent person:

- a. before first use and after completion;
- b. after any incident affecting stability (e.g. severe weather or impact);
- c. after repairs or alterations; and
- d. at least every 30 days.

(59) If an inspection identifies a risk, the scaffold must be repaired and re-inspected before reuse.

(60) Unauthorised access must be prevented on incomplete or unsafe scaffolds (e.g. signage, tagging, barriers).

(61) Safe access to and from scaffolds must be provided at all times.

(62) Scaffolds must be appropriate for the task and rated for intended loads, including workers, tools and materials:

- a. Light duty: up to 225 kg per bay;
- b. Medium duty: up to 450 kg per bay; and
- c. Heavy duty: up to 675 kg per bay.

(63) Working platforms must be adequately sized and fully planked for the work being undertaken.

(64) Scaffolds must be erected, altered and dismantled by competent persons.

(65) Where a fall of more than 4 meters is possible, work must be carried out by a licensed scaffolder (or trainee under direct supervision).

(66) Components must be compatible and used in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications.

(67) Scaffolds must include edge protection (guardrails, mid-rails and toe-boards) at all open edges and must be kept clear of debris and obstructions.

(68) Workers must:

- a. not alter scaffolding without authorisation;
- b. not use incomplete or defective scaffolds; and
- c. report hazards or defects immediately.

(69) Workers using scaffolds must receive information, training and instruction on:

- a. scaffold load limits (SWL);
- b. safe use and hazards; and
- c. emergency procedures and reporting requirements.

(70) Mobile scaffolds must be stable, level and clear of hazards (e.g. powerlines, edges), castors must be locked before use, must not be moved while occupied, and must be accessible via an internal ladder where reasonably practicable.

Step Ladders

(71) Stepladders should only be used in the fully open position. They should be positioned on a stable surface that won't wobble. They should be made as rigid as possible using side and cross braces. Some specialised types of stepladders have a working platform at the top for standing; this platform should be surrounded by a handrail. Platform ladders should only be used to handle items at a height compatible with the platform's height.

Straight and Extension Ladders

(72) The following guidance is to be applied:

- a. Extension ladders, such as rope and pulley types, are suitable for accessing high areas such as rooftops and tall trees. One specialist design is the pole ladder, which features a curved top rung to provide stability when used to access a pole or round column.
- b. If the height of the work area is higher than 3 metres, alternative work platforms should be considered, such as EWP or a portable scaffold.

Prevention of Falls from Ladders

(73) The following guidance is to be applied:

- a. Ladders shall be fitted with slip-resistant safety feet and be stood on a firm, even base.
- b. Where practicable, ladders should be set up at right angles to the working position to minimise the potential to overbalance.
- c. Ladders shall not be placed in front of doors opening towards the ladder unless the door is blocked, locked, or guarded.
- d. Three points of contact must be maintained.
- e. Tools or materials must not be carried while climbing/descending the ladder. Tools must be carried in a tool belt or a side pouch, and equipment must be passed up by an assistant.
- f. Persons must always face towards the ladder and must always remain within the ladder styles, i.e. no leaning out from the sides.
- g. No person is permitted to "rock" or "walk" a ladder to reposition it.
- h. No person shall stand on a ladder any higher than the third rung from the top of the ladder. Only one person is allowed on the ladder at a given time.

- i. Shoes are to be in good condition with adequate tread on the soles to prevent slipping.
- j. Metal or metal-bound ladders are never to be used for electrical work or close to energised electrical power lines.
- k. Ladders are not to be used on scaffolds, in elevated work platforms or placed on boxes, barrels, or other unstable bases to gain extra height.

Ladder Inspections and Maintenance

(74) Ladders should be well-maintained, stored under cover, and have adequate support to prevent sagging.

(75) They should be inspected at regular intervals and any defects or deterioration repaired before further use. Ladders must undergo regular checks and be maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications.

(76) Damaged ladders should be taken out of service until they are repaired by a competent person or destroyed in such a manner as to render them useless.

Falling or Dropped Objects

(77) Objects falling from heights can place those working near or below at risk. Consideration must be given to plant, equipment, or other objects required for use at heights.

(78) Where working at height requires objects such as tools and equipment, they should be tethered to prevent them from falling to the ground, and a barrier should be used to close off the work area underneath or other means should be used to prevent persons working or passing by underneath.

Scissor lifts

(79) Manufacturer or supplier's instructions are consulted for information on safe operation.

(80) If stated in a scissor lift operational manual, a harness may be a mandatory requirement.

(81) If a scissor lift is being operated where there is a risk of coming into contact with overhead structures a Working at Heights license shall be in place for the works.

(82) A valid High Risk Work License is required to operate a scissor lift over a platform taller than 11 meters.

(83) Personnel required to operate a scissor lift (including the standby/spotter person) must have completed a nationally accredited course by a Registered training organisation (RTO).

Section 5 - Non-Compliance

(84) Non-compliance with Governance Documents is considered a breach of the [Code of Conduct - Employees](#) or the [Code of Conduct - Students](#), as applicable, and is treated seriously by the University. Reports of concerns about non-compliance will be managed in accordance with the applicable disciplinary procedures outlined in the [Charles Darwin University and Union Enterprise Agreement 2025](#) and the [Code of Conduct - Students](#).

(85) Complaints may be raised in accordance with the [Complaints and Grievance Policy and Procedure - Employees](#) and [Complaints Policy - Students](#).

(86) All staff members have an individual responsibility to raise any suspicion, allegation or report of fraud or corruption in accordance with the [Fraud and Corruption Control Policy](#) and [Whistleblower Reporting \(Improper Conduct\) Procedure](#).

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	3rd September 2026
Review Date	3rd September 2029
Approval Authority	Vice-Chancellor
Approval Date	1st September 2026
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Responsible Executive	Fiona Coulson Vice-Chancellor
Implementation Officer	Peta Preo Director People and Culture
Enquiries Contact	Leah Kenna Senior Manager Work Health and Safety Work Health and Safety

Glossary Terms and Definitions

"Registered training organisation (RTO)" - A training organisation that is listed as a Registered Training Organisation on the National Register referred to in section 216 of the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011.

"Risk assessment" - A systematic process of evaluating potential risks that may be involved in an activity. It is made up of three separate parts: risk identification, risk analysis, and risk evaluation.

"Competent person" - Competent person means a person who has acquired through training, qualification and experience, the knowledge and skills to carry out a specified task.

"University" - Charles Darwin University, a body corporate established under section 4 of the Charles Darwin University Act 2003. The University is comprised of the various faculties, CDU TAFE, organisational units, and formal committees, including the governing University Council and Academic Board.