
Use of Plasterers' Stilts

Purpose

The purpose of this Guidance Note is to provide builders, plastering contractors, employers and users of stilts with health and safety guidance on the use of stilts in construction workplaces.¹

Background

WorkSafe has previously maintained a zero tolerance approach on the use of plasterers' stilts in the construction industry. Zero tolerance was articulated and supported by various publications, information campaigns and enforcement blitzes that were undertaken by WorkSafe.

The zero tolerance policy was understood and practised by principal contractors on commercial construction sites and many house builders and plastering contractors, however there were still plastering contractors and builders who condoned and promoted their use.

In 2006, WorkSafe initiated a review of its policy by engaging with industry stakeholders and other interested parties. The review resulted in the production of this guidance note which sanctions the use of plasterers' stilts when **complying with specific conditions**.

WorkSafe will continue to monitor the use of plasterers' stilts by industry and review the guidance note as necessary.

Requirements

1. Work area layout

Employers should identify all potential stilts hazards such as:

- changes in the level or slope of the work area;
- railings adjacent to edges;

¹ This Guidance note supersedes WorkSafe publications "Why WorkSafe will not Tolerate Stilts for Construction Work" (July 2002) and Alert "Dangers in using stilts for elevated work" (May 2002).

- wall or ceiling features (for example, arches, lights, bulkheads) that may restrict movement when using stilts;
- Floor penetrations, stairwells and voids;
- Windows; and
- Inbuilt furniture.

2. Work area condition

Stilts should not be used where the ceiling height is greater than three metres. Also, work should not commence until the work area is “Plaster Ready” which, in this case, means:

- Floor surfaces are solid, level and can support stilt work activity (eg: earthen floors have been concreted).
- 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 and offer them protection. [Note: Guardrails effective at normal working heights are unlikely to be effective with stilt workers.]
- Furniture is removed and inbuilt furniture, such as kitchen cupboards or architectural features, is isolated or highlighted.

3. Work Planning and Conduct

Stilt workers should not commence work before risk control measures ensure that :

- 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);
- There is a safe means of attaching and removing stilts readily available [Refer step 6 below];
- Any waste produced and material dropped by stilt workers is promptly cleared away (by an assistant) from the floor surface they are working on; and
- Emergency procedures detail how stilt workers are to evacuate.

4. Suitable tasks

Stilts should only be used for light duty tasks such as:

- placing of insulation batts;
- installing furring channels;
- patching, touching up and stopping of joints using a trowel;
- fixing cornices; and

- minor hand sanding.

The stilt worker's torso should be vertical whenever possible, so tasks that require frequent bending should be avoided.

Any one period of working on stilts should be not greater than 2 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 6 hours per day.

Supervisors should regularly check that stilt workers are not experiencing fatigue. If stilt workers begin to experience fatigue, they should **immediately** remove their stilts.

5. Tools and Equipment

Only hand held tools (without leads) such as the following should be used by stilt workers:

- trowel;
- hammer;
- sanding block; and
- cordless screw gun.

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.



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



6. Training, use and maintenance of stilts

Stilts must not be used without proper training. The plasterers' stilts must be from a recognised industry supplier who will provide instructions on their correct use that must be followed at all times.

A rigid platform should be used for mounting / dismantling 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 / dismantling stilts. Stepping up and balancing on one stilt then bending to fit the second is also not acceptable.

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; and a briefing on what injuries can occur from the incorrect use of stilts.

The stilt worker should gain experience and confidence before working and also before performing tasks such as working with their head up, using tools in both hands or working at maximum height. They should also take every opportunity to remove the stilts when they are not necessary for the task.

Stilt components must be examined regularly and any worn or damaged components replaced immediately. They also must be stored, serviced and maintained in accordance with the supplier's instructions.

Stilts should NOT be used when:

- the work site is not "Plaster Ready".
- fatigue is observed or experienced;
- the stilts are poorly maintained or not from a recognised industry supplier;
- lifting or supporting plaster sheets (WorkSafe recommends the use of a pneumatically-powered plaster sheet lifter with large extension screw gun (pictured below) for this task);
- handling long, heavy or cumbersome objects or items, such as decorative cornices;
- employees have not been properly trained in their use;
- walking on stairs;
- the floor level is not solid, changes height or slopes;
- stepping into or over baths or other obstructions;

- placed on a non-floor surface (such as tables, trestles, etc);
- walking backwards;
- the springs are fully compressed (caused when lifting heavy objects or exerting high upward force, such as drilling through overhead structures);
- picking up items from below knee level;
- standing on void covers that bend from the weight;
- using inappropriate equipment such as trowel boxes, tools with power leads or hoses;
- there is absence of a suitable mounting / dismounting platform;
- the ceiling height is greater than 3 metres; or
- the task requires frequent bending or over-reaching.



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.



Pictured: a pneumatically-powered plaster sheet lifter with large extension screw gun

Further WorkSafe information

- Suitability of Worksite for Stilt Use - Supervisor checklist

Codes of Practice and guidance material are available on WorkSafe Victoria's web site www.worksafe.vic.gov.au or contact the WorkSafe Advisory Service on 1800 136 089.

Note: This guidance material has been prepared using the best information available to WorkSafe Victoria. Any information about legislative obligations or responsibilities included in this material is only applicable to the circumstances described in the material. You should always check the legislation referred to in this material and make your own judgement about what action you may need to take to ensure you have complied with the law. Accordingly, the Victorian WorkCover Authority extends no warranties as to the suitability of the information for your specific circumstances.



SUITABILITY OF WORKSITE FOR STILT USE

SUPERVISOR CHECKLIST¹

Completed by:		Date:	
Location:			
Activity / task:			

	Checked
Checking that the site is “Plaster Ready”.	
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 which 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	
The tasks to be completed are light duty tasks (refer table over page).	
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 2 hours (or the task can be broken in to 2 hour blocks); with no more than 6 hours wearing stilts per day.	
Ceiling heights are no greater than 3 metres.	
The proposed activity and movement is permitted by the manufacturer’s instruction manual.	
Tools to be used whilst on stilts are appropriate and compatible.	
Preparation	
Identification of hazardous manual handling has been completed	
Manual handling risk controls implemented.	
JSA has been completed.	
Stilt workers 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 fatigued 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.	

Please refer to rules for use and non-use on back page

¹ Released as an attachment to WorkSafe Guidance Note “Use of Plasterers’ Stilts”.

Rules for use and non-use of stilts

Stilts should only be used for light duty tasks such as:

- placing of insulation batts;
- installing furring channels;
- screwing sheets to furring channels, trusses, underside of floor joists and walls;
- patching, touching up and stopping of joints using a trowel;
- fixing cornices; and
- minor hand sanding.

Stilts should NOT be used when:

- the work site is not “Plaster Ready”;
- observing or experiencing fatigue;
- they are poorly maintained or not from a recognised industry supplier;
- lifting or supporting plaster sheets (WorkSafe recommends the use of a pneumatically-powered plaster sheet lifter for this task);
- handling long, heavy or cumbersome objects or items, such as decorative cornices;
- employees have not been properly trained in their use:
- walking on stairs;
- the floor level is not solid, changes height or slopes;
- stepping into or over baths or other obstructions;
- placed on a non-floor surface (such as tables, trestles, etc);
- the springs are fully compressed (caused when lifting heavy objects or exerting high upward force, such as drilling through overhead structures);
- picking up items from below knee level;
- standing on void covers that bend from the weight;
- using inappropriate equipment such as trowel boxes, tools with power leads or hoses;
- there is absence of a suitable mounting / dismounting platform;
- the ceiling height is greater than 3 metres; or
- the task requires frequent bending of the torso or over-reaching.