



Safe Work Method Statement (SWMS)



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A SWMS is a document that sets out the High risk construction work (HRCW) activities to be carried out at a workplace, the hazards arising from these activities and the measures to be put in place to control the risks to health and safety. Its primary purpose is to help workers and supervisors to implement and monitor the control measures established to make sure the work is carried out safely.

HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT PREPARING A SWMS?

A typical approach to developing a SWMS involves the following:

GATHER ALL RELEVANT INFORMATION ABOUT THE WORK

The first task is to determine the types of HRCW that the work involves and how it is to be carried out.

FIND OUT THE HAZARDS

Review the proposed work and information about each task to determine the hazards, i.e., the events or things that may cause harm to workers or other people. Information, such as codes of practice or guidance material, may be available on the website of your workplace health and safety regulator for specific construction tasks.

CONSULT WITH THE RELEVANT WORKERS

In consultation with the workers that will undertake the HRCW, their supervisors and health and safety representatives (if any) review the local health and safety requirements, and the proposed work.

Consider the views of workers about the hazards, the potential risk control measures and any site-specific matters that may impact the safety of the work. If there are other workers that could be impacted by the work they must also be consulted.

Note: There is a legal obligation to consult affected workers and their health and safety representatives when identifying hazards or selecting measures to control risk, and to take their views into account.

SELECT THE MOST APPROPRIATE CONTROL MEASURES TO ELIMINATE OR REDUCE RISKS

To select the most appropriate control measures you need to apply the 'hierarchy of control' as detailed in steps 1 to 5 below.

1. First, you must seek to eliminate risks so far as is reasonably practicable (e.g., doing as much work as possible on the ground rather than at height).
2. If it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate risks, you must implement any specific control measures that are mandatory by law in your jurisdiction.

Some workplace health and safety laws prescribe specific control measures that must be applied for managing risks to health and safety arising from particular hazards or activities. Examples include, but are not limited to, work involving asbestos, work at height, work in confined spaces. Specific requirements are in the workplace health and safety laws available in the website of your workplace health and safety regulator.

3. After implementing step 2, if a risk remains, the risk must be reduced so far as is reasonably practicable by implementing one, or a combination of the following:

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- Substituting a process or substance with one that is less hazardous. For example, wet sweeping instead of dry sweeping of hazardous dusts such as crystalline silica.
 - Isolating workers and other persons from the hazard. For example by installing barriers between workers and mobile plant.
 - Using engineering controls. For example, using an elevated work platform or a scaffold to reduce the risk of falling from height.
4. If after implementing the above control measures a risk to health or safety still remains, reduce that risk, so far as is reasonably practicable, by using administrative controls. This includes safety training, work instructions, warning signs and supervision. For example, if a scaffold is used to reduce risks you may need to include scaffold tags showing acceptable maximum loads, signs for incomplete scaffolds. You may also need to describe the training required for those erecting the scaffold and the supervision of scaffold users.
5. If a risk to health or safety still remains after implementing the above, reduce that risk, so far as is reasonably practicable by providing personal protective equipment (PPE). This includes using protective clothing such as safety glasses, hard hats, gloves, respiratory protection, or a combination of appropriate PPE.

In most cases, a combination of control measures will need to be applied to minimise risks as far as is reasonably practicable.

WRITING UP THE SWMS – WHAT INFORMATION MUST BE INCLUDED?

A SWMS must:

- identify the work that is high risk construction work
- specify the hazards relating to the high risk construction work and the risks to health and safety
- describe the measures to be implemented to control the risks, and
- describe how the control measures are to be implemented, monitored and reviewed.

The control measures must be set out and expressed in a way that is readily accessible and comprehensible to the persons who will use the SWMS. Describe in clear terms how risks to health and safety are to be controlled to enable the work to be done safely, and how the control measures are to be implemented.

You can use any form or template to write up the SWMS, including paper and electronic formats, provided the above information is included and is readily accessible.

CAN I USE A GENERIC SWMS?

A generic SWMS can be used after it has been reviewed and revised as necessary to make sure that it covers all the hazards and risks that are present on the site where the work is to be carried out. A generic SWMS needs to be reviewed/revised prior to commencing the work and prior to commencing a new activity or a change in work location or circumstances.