



12/04/06

Mr Dick Whitehead  
Safety Coordinator, CFMEU  
Level 10, Unions NSW Building  
337 Sussex Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2010

Dear Sir

RE: POTENTIAL UNSAFE WORK PRACTICES – STONE SLAB HANDLING

WorkCover aims to work in partnership with the New South Wales community to achieve safer workplaces, effective return to work, and security for injured workers. As part of that undertaking, WorkCover is keen to highlight potential unsafe work practices in specific industries that may have the potential to cause injury.

Recently, WorkCover conducted an investigation into an incident where a worker was seriously injured when he was struck by falling slabs of granite, as he returned a granite slab to an “A” frame rack for storage. The hazards associated with the stacking of granite slabs in the rack had not been identified, assessed or controlled by the employer. Consequently the system of work for the loading and storage of stone slabs in the “A” frame racking was not safe.

This matter was prosecuted by WorkCover in the Chief Industrial Magistrates Court and the company was convicted and fined \$14,300.00. The Chief Industrial Magistrate, as part of his judgement stated **‘the incident occurred because the defendant did not have a safe system of work for the loading and storage of stone slabs in the “A” frame racking’**.

**The Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000 (section 8), places an absolute obligation on employers to ensure that systems of work and the working environment of employees and others is safe and without risk to health. The handling of heavy stone slabs constitutes high-risk activity and has the potential to lead to serious injury.**

- Employers must take steps to identify any foreseeable hazards that arise due to the loading, stacking and storage of stone slabs. Hazards include the potential for stacked slabs to fall when being accessed for transfer or movement.
- In consultation with employees, employers should then assess the risks by considering the likelihood of the slabs falling at their workplace and the possible severity of injury. Clearly, appropriate control measures must be implemented to minimize or eliminate these risks.
- Control measures should include a safe system of work to ensure that slabs are stored at an appropriate angle and adequately restrained to prevent falling at all

times. Restraints should have the potential allow access to individual slabs for movement or transfer while maintaining the slabs in a secure, restrained position. The following factors must be considered.

- Ground and environmental conditions – Ensure the ground where stacks are assembled is flat, strong and well maintained. The stability of the slabs may also be affected by weather conditions.
- Racking – The racking should be selected carefully after considering the weight shape and size of the slabs being stacked. The racking should keep the slabs off the ground and allow access for lifting equipment to retrieve the slab during movement or transfer. The racking must be fixed securely to the floor and marked with maximum load information. Racking must be regularly inspected to ensure it is in adequate condition at all times.
- Restraint – Select restraints that are suitable for the demands to which it will be subjected and ensure fasteners are adequate. Periodic inspections must be undertaken to ensure that the restraint and fasteners are in good condition.
- Safe work practices – Before unstacking, ensure the working area is safe. Check for signs of instability or defects in the stacking, racking and restraints. Move only one slab at a time and do not leave isolated single slabs. Stack conditions should be regularly monitored and maintained by trained staff.
- Storage area management – The risk assessment must consider how lifting equipment and other vehicles operate in and around the storage area. Adequate lighting and mirrors must be provided to give good visibility and reduce blind spots for pedestrians and other vehicles. Roadways and aisles must be clearly designated and defined and where possible segregated from other vehicles.
- Employers must also ensure that employees are adequately supervised and provided with adequate training to undertake this activity safely.

As a key stakeholder in this industry, WorkCover seeks your assistance in disseminating this information to employers across the sector. If you have any enquiries, please contact Mr Rob Stobo Manager – Manufacturing Team, on telephone 4321 5611.

Yours sincerely

JOHN WATSON

**General Manager – Occupational Health and Safety**