

# Construction blitz 2023

**Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ) inspectors audited 113 construction projects during November and December 2023 as part of a statewide compliance blitz. The blitz was undertaken to increase industry awareness and test work health and safety (WHS) compliance of high risk construction sites across Queensland following an increase in the number of construction-related fatalities in 2023.**

The two-phase campaign included an education and awareness phase where almost 64,000 builders and contractors were sent information and guidance materials relating to the upcoming compliance activity focus areas. This approach was adopted to assist in changing behaviour across a large portion of the construction industry and to act as a reminder to businesses of the importance of WHS and the sanctions associated with non-compliance.

Phase two focussed on field compliance activities targeting a high risk cohort of workplaces across the state. The risk profiling considered incident data, and other intelligence.

The focus of the site visits included four high risk activities (concrete pumping, formwork, scaffolding, working at height), and also targeted two sectors of the construction industry (medium rise and civil construction).

Inspectors identified non-compliances on over half of the sites visited and issued 114 enforcement notices. The most frequent area of non-compliance was scaffolding.

## Background

In 2023, seven construction workers were fatally injured in Queensland. In 2022–23, there were 4350 serious injury workers' compensation claims from the construction sector. Construction continues to have the third highest serious injury claim rate per 1000 workers behind agriculture, forestry and fishing and manufacturing. The five-year average claim rate for the construction industry is 18.1 per 1000 workers compared to 12.4 per 1000 workers for all industries.

**A review of incidents notified to WHSQ between November 2022 and October 2023, identified trends in the following areas:**

- falls from height
- scaffolding, including workers falling from scaffold and falling objects
- mobile plant contacting overhead electric lines and underground services lines on civil construction sites or during earthworks
- mobile plant overturning, hitting, or running over workers on civil construction sites
- formwork
- concrete pumping
- injuries to young or inexperienced workers.

The construction blitz was undertaken to remind construction businesses and workers of their duties, to reduce incidents, prevent further fatalities and serious injuries and for the WHS regulator to take enforcement action when necessary.








# The campaign: Phase 1

**63,991** Businesses were provided resources and information

**40,773** Businesses opened their email

**26,383** Clicks on resources and information

## Clicks on resources and information

	<a href="#">Mobile plant</a>	32%	(8327 views)
	<a href="#">Work at height</a>	28%	(7470 views)
	<a href="#">Concrete pumping</a>	21%	(5608 views)
	<a href="#">Young workers</a>	7%	(1736 views)
	<a href="#">Formwork</a>	5%	(1347 views)
	<a href="#">Scaffolding</a>	4%	(1181 views)
	<a href="#">WorkSafe website</a>	3%	(714 views)



## Feedback from businesses who were sent information and guidance material in phase one.



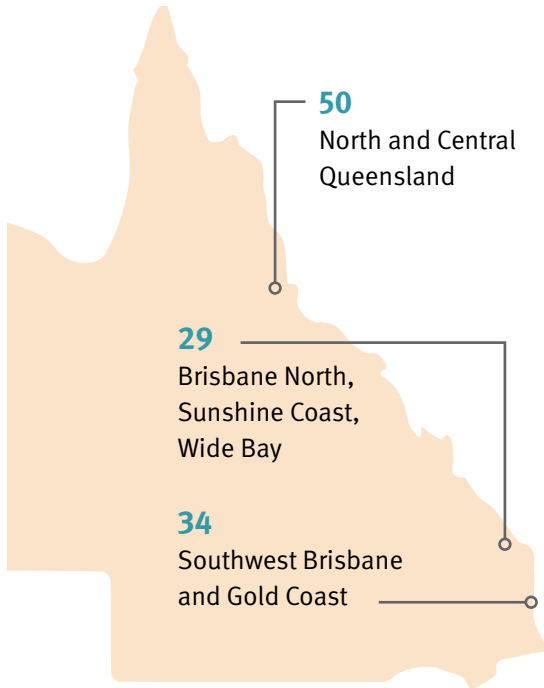
- It is good for people at my level in the business to get reminders about safety.
- The information on the number of incidents on civil sites and overhead electric line strikes was handy.
- The information was circulated through the management structure and project teams. We talked about it at peer group meetings, with site safety advisors and at managers' team meetings.
- We tried to relate the information back to our company's trends and internal communications to reinforce the messages to the whole company.
- I know all the guys that work for me and I don't want to see them hurt.
- I was more conscious of the topics at that time.
- Information like this is helpful.



# The campaign: Phase 2

## Inspectors' activities

113 audits



## Engaged with

- 68 principal contractors
- more than 130 sub-contractors

Distributed information about the [Young Worker Health and Safety Toolkit](#).

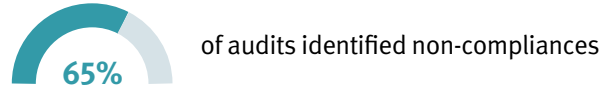
## Non-compliances

**Inspectors may issue enforcement notices for non-compliances they identify while on site. If non-compliances are rectified while the inspector is still on site, the inspector may not take enforcement action.**

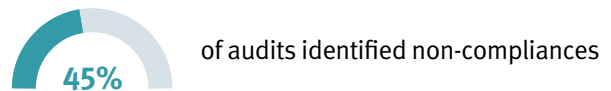
The following information on non-compliances includes those rectified while the inspector was on site and those where an enforcement notice was issued.

**Non-compliances were identified during 59 per cent of audits**

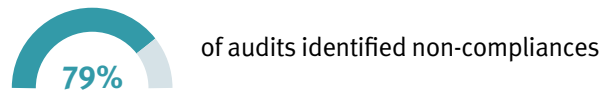
### Civil construction sites



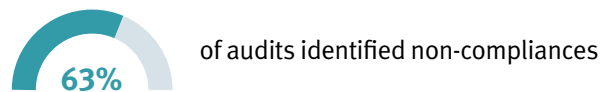
### Medium rise construction sites



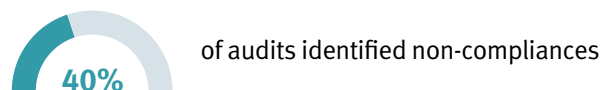
### Working at height audits



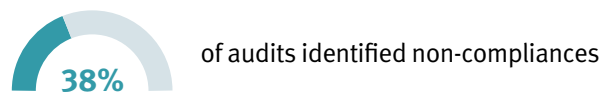
### Scaffolding audits



### Formwork audits



### Concrete pumping audits



# The campaign: Phase 2

## 114 enforcement notices were issued

Improvement	86%	(98 notices)
Prohibition	7%	(8 notices)
Electrical safety protection	2%	(2 notices)
Infringement	5%	(6 notices)



110 non-compliances were rectified while inspectors were on site and enforcement action was not taken.

## Areas of non-compliance

The areas of non-compliance are based on both enforcement notices issued and non-compliances rectified while inspectors were on site without enforcement action being taken. Non-compliances related to scaffolding were identified by inspectors more often than other areas of non-compliance.

### Areas of non-compliance

Scaffold	33%
Other	26%
Work environment	13%
Working at heights	11%
Electrical	10%
Formwork	8%



Note: Included in 'other' are 16 different areas of non-compliance. These areas include emergency plans, concrete pumping equipment, traffic management, hazardous chemicals, mobile plant, falling objects, first aid etc.

# The campaign: Phase 2

## Scaffolding (33 per cent of non-compliances)

- Scaffolding non-compliances were identified during audits for **all six targeted areas** of concern, not just during scaffolding audits.

**32%** of non-compliances identified during work at height audits related to scaffolding.

**31%** of enforcement notices were issued in relation to scaffolding non-compliances.

**27%** of all sites visited had scaffolding non-compliances (30 sites).

- The most common scaffolding areas of non-compliance included:
  - scaffolds were not erected in accordance with the scaffold plan
  - components were missing
  - working platforms were unsafe due to a variety of uncontrolled risks
  - there were uncontrolled risks of falls from height
  - there were gaps between the scaffold and building exceeding 225 mm
  - step heights from the scaffold stair module to the working platform were more than 300 mm (when there was a change in direction between landings).

Principal contractors, scaffolders and all trades using scaffold are reminded of their shared responsibility for ensuring the scaffold is safe to use and consistent with the [Scaffolding Code of Practice 2021](#).

## Work environment (13 per cent of non-compliances)

- **11 different issues** related to work environment non-compliances were identified during the audits. These issues include:
  - amenities
  - housekeeping
  - signage
  - access and egress
  - site security
  - slips
  - trips
  - falls
  - air quality
  - water hazards etc.
- Work environment non-compliances were identified during audits for **all six targeted areas** of concern.

**62%** of work environment non-compliances were identified during medium rise and civil construction site audits.

**41%** of work environment non-compliances related to amenities and housekeeping.

**11%** of enforcement notices were issued in relation to work environment non-compliances.

**20%** of all sites visited had work environment non-compliances (23 sites).

Principal contractors are reminded of the [Managing the Work Environment and Facilities Code of Practice 2021](#).

# The campaign: Phase 2

## Working at height (11 per cent of non-compliances)

- Uncontrolled risks of falls from height were identified during civil construction and medium rise audits, scaffolding audits, and predominantly during work at height audits.
- Almost **one-third** of non-compliance identified during work at height audits related to **scaffolding**.
- Across **all four types of audits** where work at height non-compliances were identified, the most common areas of non-compliance related to:

**21%** of height non-compliances were related to edge protection, particularly when work was undertaken on a roof.

**21%** of height non-compliances were related to not having a safe work method statement (SWMS) when there was a risk of falling more than two metres or the SWMS was incomplete.

**10%** of enforcement notices were issued in relation to work at height non-compliances.

**13%** of all sites visited had work at height non-compliances (15 sites).

All contractors are reminded of the [Managing the Risk of Falls at Workplaces Code of Practice 2021](#).

## Electrical (10 per cent of non-compliances)

- Electrical non-compliances were identified during audits for **five of the six areas** of concern (electrical issues were not identified during concrete pumping audits), but most commonly during:

**32%** of electrical non-compliances were during medium rise site audits.

**27%** of electrical non-compliances were during civil construction site audits.

**23%** of electrical non-compliances were during scaffolding audits.

- The non-compliances primarily related to **testing and tagging** of electrical equipment and the maintenance or location of electrical **distribution boards**.

**9%** of enforcement notices were issued in relation to electrical non-compliances.

**12%** of all sites visited had electrical non-compliances (13 sites).

All contractors are reminded of the requirements of [AS/NZS 3012 Electrical Installations – Construction and Demolition Sites](#).

# The campaign: Phase 2

## Formwork (8 per cent of non-compliances)

- Non-compliances with formwork were identified during audits for **four of the six areas** of concern (formwork non-compliances were not identified during civil construction and work at height audits).

**47%** of non-compliances were identified during formwork audits.

**29%** of non-compliances were identified during medium rise site audits.

- Formwork non-compliances covered a wide range of issues, for example:
  - access and egress
  - design certification
  - consistency with the engineer's specifications or design drawings
  - damaged components
  - risk of falls.

**5%** of enforcement notices were issued in relation to formwork non-compliances.

**9%** of all construction sites visited had formwork non-compliances (10 sites).

Contractors are reminded of the [Formwork Code of Practice 2016](#).

## Civil construction sites

- **Nine areas** of non-compliance were identified on civil construction sites.
- **56%** of the non-compliances related to three areas:

**25%** of civil construction site non-compliances were related to the work environment.

**17%** of civil construction site non-compliances were related to electrical issues, predominantly in relation to testing and tagging electrical equipment.

**14%** of civil construction site non-compliances were related to hazardous chemicals.

- In addition:

**19%** of enforcement notices were issued during audits on civil construction sites.

**14%** of all audits undertaken were civil construction site audits.

Principal contractors are reminded of the:

- [Managing the Work Environment and Facilities Code of Practice 2021](#)
- [Managing Risks of Hazardous Chemicals in the Workplace Code of Practice 2021](#)
- [Labelling of Workplace Hazardous Chemicals Code of Practice 2021](#)
- [Preparation of Safety Data Sheets for Hazardous Chemicals Code of Practice 2021](#).



# Post blitz survey

## A survey was undertaken of 300 businesses with 50 responses obtained.

10 businesses recalled the initial email and a further 29 respondents expressed interest in receiving the email again for review, indicating potential for increased engagement with targeted reminders.

The businesses who recalled the email indicated that they had adopted various safety measures, such as increased supervision, reinforcement of safety protocols and designation of safety officers on-site.

Specific approaches by persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) included some PCBUs prioritising apprentice safety, while others emphasised existing safety commitments or adopted a collaborative approach within their teams.

General feedback included varying perspectives on the effectiveness of compliance blitzes and safety measures were noted, with suggestions for sustained compliance through regular blitzes.

Considerations for improvement included suggestions such as conducting surveys during or immediately after blitzes for more precise results and exploring innovative communication avenues such as social media, website notifications, or establishing a forum for greater engagement and impact.

Overall, the feedback highlights the importance of improving communication strategies, sustaining safety measures, and exploring innovative approaches to enhance engagement and outreach effectiveness in future blitzes.



## Actions

Industry should monitor, review and develop improved systems of work in relation to scaffolding, working at height, maintaining a safe work environment and on civil construction sites.

WHSQ will undertake further audits of scaffolding, work at height and civil construction sites.



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