



# Residential construction safety – back to basics



## Campaign report

The residential construction industry is at risk of injury from fundamental construction activities including poor housekeeping practices, not using the right tool(s) for the job, poor planning, falls from ladders or other surfaces and inadequate site supervision and security.

The residential construction safety – back to basics campaign aimed to reduce non-compliance in fundamental construction activities undertaken at residential developments to reduce the number of injuries.

This report details interim outcomes of the campaign and provides practical guidance for industry to reduce the risk of injury from fundamental activities.



## Key issues

Workers' compensation data from 2008–2014 indicates that 77 per cent of civil construction and 79 per cent of construction services injuries are attributed to one of the following:

- body stressing
- slips, trips and falls
- striking or being hit by moving objects.

Contributing factors include:

- metal objects
- sawn or dressed timber
- shovels and spades
- moving or working around site
- uneven ground surfaces
- ladders
- hand tools
- power tools.



## The campaign

Between August 2015 and August 2016, a series of sequential site assessments in residential developments by construction inspectors have been conducted with a focus on:

- falls prevention (through voids, from ladders, trestles and other work platforms)
- using the right tool(s) for the job
- planning for safety, including preparation of safe work method statements (SWMS)
- site housekeeping
- site security
- site supervision
- additional issues (e.g. electrical).

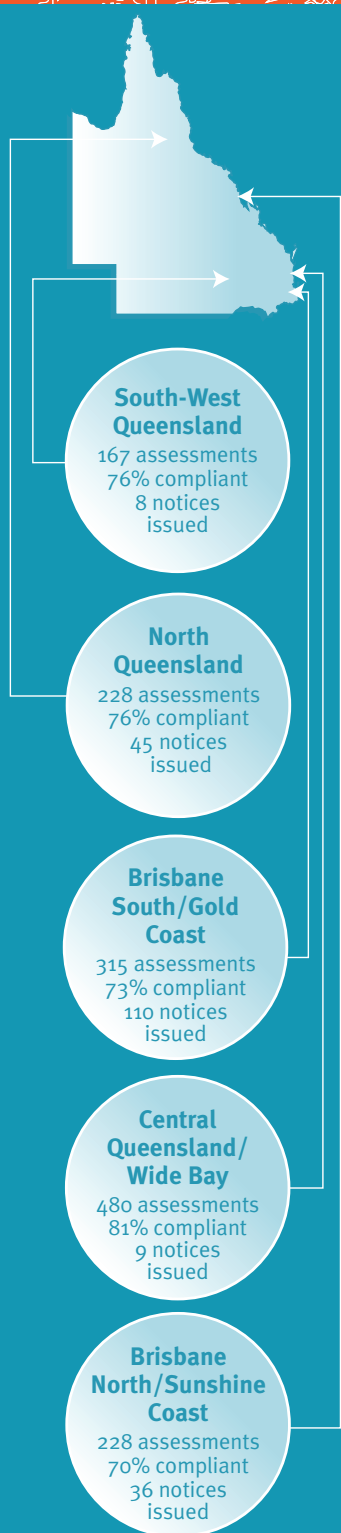
## Assessment results

A total of 1,418 assessments have been undertaken between August 2015 and August 2016.

### Notices issued

A total of 208 statutory notices were issued by inspectors. Eighty seven per cent were improvement notices and 28 per cent were prohibition notices. The majority of notices were issued for:

- site security (63)
- falls prevention (45)
- housekeeping (44)
- additional issues (44), with the majority for electrical issues, particularly non-compliance with test-and-tag requirements.





## Levels of compliance

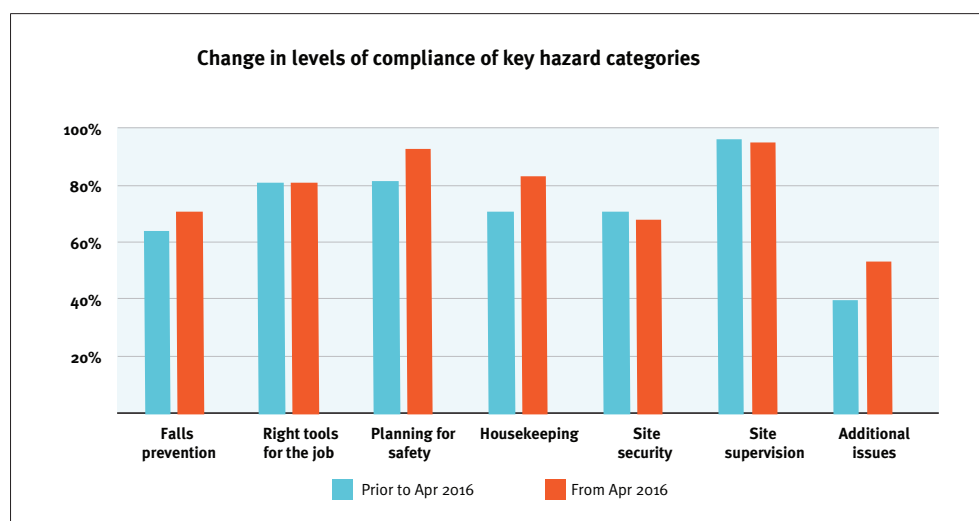
The data from a sample of 623 assessments were analysed to evaluate the level of compliance of seven categories of residential construction work activity.

The three categories with the lowest levels of compliance were additional issues (44 per cent, mainly relating to electrical issues), falls prevention (66 per cent) and site security (70 per cent).

The infographic on the left of this page outlines the number of assessments completed, notices issued and levels of compliance by region and hazard category.

## Industry trends

The chart below details the level of compliance for each category across all regions for assessments completed during the first half of the project (up to 31 March 2016) and the second half of the project (from April 2016 onwards).



There was a slight increase in compliance levels in a number of categories over 12 months. Categories showing improvement were generally those with lower levels of compliance initially. This could indicate that the campaign increased industry awareness.

Qualitative feedback from inspectors indicated an increase in compliance but also highlighted that there was still a significant amount of improvement required for the industry.

### Some of the feedback included:

'...some individual house builders have improved their attitude towards Workplace Health and Safety Queensland as a result of our involvement with them, but certainly not the industry as a whole'.

'Most of the tradesmen I have interacted with provided positive feedback, knowing inspectors are potentially in the vicinity encourages a positive safety culture'.

'Builders with established safety systems are generally motivated (e.g. larger project builders) but the smaller builders are not motivated and generally only do what they have to or are made to do by inspectors'.

'...the sector still shows reluctance to continuing compliance with all legislative requirements without constant and ongoing interaction with inspectors'.

Sustained inspectorate activity focused on significant areas of residential development for a significant period of time would be required to ensure improvements can be observed at the industry level. However, there were some anecdotal reports from inspectors that demonstrated how some builders had made considerable improvements to the way they managed health and safety on subsequent sites. An example is detailed below:

#### Site one - 18 August 2015

- Carpenters on site without SWMS for work at heights over two metres
- No height access provided by principal contractor
- Toilet on nature strip
- No WHSMP on site
- Improvement notice was issued.



#### Site two - 20 April 2016

- Scaffold around perimeter low set for carpenters and roofers
- Edge protection
- WHSMP onsite
- Electricians on site, SWMS with them.
- Pool fenced to exclude open excavation.
- Toilet inside construction zone.



Industry feedback during the campaign highlighted that other key stakeholders such as large residential developers, local governments, industry associations and industry network groups have a role to play in improving health and safety in the residential construction industry. This includes incorporating safety in the planning, tendering and procuring stages of construction projects.



## Campaign resources

There is a range of information available at [worksafe.qld.gov.au](http://worksafe.qld.gov.au) to assist residential builders, civil contractors, carpenters, bricklayers, painters, plumbers and small contractors, including:

- managing the risk of falls while working on roofs in housing construction
- housing industry site safety pack - WorkCover NSW
- safe work method statements
- dial before you dig - safe excavation information.

## Future actions

The findings indicate that the campaign has begun to make improvements in compliance levels, however a significant amount of additional work is required in this area to achieve any observable industry-level change.

Under the *Queensland Construction Trades Industry Action Plan – 2014-2017* and *Civil Construction Industry Action Plan 2014-2017*, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland will:

- continue to focus on compliance for fundamental construction activities in areas with suitable levels of residential construction
- continue to engage with civil contractors (undertaking preparation of the development) and priority construction trades of carpentry, bricklaying, painting and plumbing
- continue to engage with smaller contractors who, evidence suggests, need to improve basic work health and safety practices
- work with other government entities and developers to improve safety performance in residential construction developments
- engage with relevant stakeholders and seek their assistance with communicating the interim findings to their membership.

## More information

For more information, visit [worksafe.qld.gov.au](http://worksafe.qld.gov.au) or call 1300 362 128.

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