

Contributor:

Regrettably, five fatalities occurred in the Construction Sector in 2024. We all need to refocus and work collectively with the goal of eliminating the fatality rate. All workplace fatalities are preventable, and it is everyone's responsibility to ensure all onsite safety controls are implemented and managed correctly. January represents an opportunity to reflect on the year that has ended, and to set new goals for the year ahead and lead by example. Due to the current extreme inclement weather we are currently experiencing, it is crucial to have a strong focus on emergency preparedness and response in the workplace. We must re-focus our efforts in addressing site safety hazards such as slips, trips and falls, working at height, proximity to mobile plant and machinery, live services, occupational dust, non-compliant PPE/RPE etc. It is imperative to revise your RAMS and where necessary implement the further control measures required to ensure compliance is met.



Description

Slips, trips and falls can result in injuries that cause serious consequences. It is important to understand how slips, trips and falls occur, how to identify hazards, and how to eliminate or minimize the hazards. Due to the current cold climate, please ensure all walkways and access routes are clear of frost and ice. Review all platform and scaffold accesses to ensure the surfaces are fit for purpose. An adequate and appropriate level of lighting must be provided on all areas of the worksites during the winter months to accommodate the early dark mornings and evenings.

Working at height remains one of the biggest causes of fatalities and major injuries in the construction industry. Ensure all involved in the work at height are competent and trained to carry out the work. The risks associated must be assessed, and suitable control measures implemented and communicated to all personnel engaged in the work at height. All work at height equipment must be maintained and inspected regularly.

Emergency preparedness and response is vital when planning a construction project. The size and type of projects, as well as their access and location, should be considered when preparing an Emergency Response Plan. The Emergency Response Plan should include (but is not limited to) the following:

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| 1) hazard identification/assessment | 4) administration of the plan |
| 2) emergency resources | 5) emergency response procedure |
| 3) communication systems | 6) communication of the procedure |

Plant and Machinery operations should be segregated from pedestrian areas. Use clear signage and ensure adequate lighting is available. Employ trained signal signallers to guide vehicles and equipment safely. Ensure the plant and machinery are certified, fit for purpose and in good working order; pay particular attention to auxiliary devices, tyres, brakes and mirrors etc.

PPE / RPE – Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) means any device or appliance designed to be worn or held by an individual for protection against one or more health and safety hazards. PPE plays a vital role in the current extreme cold temperatures. The correct PPE clothing will protect against cold and wet conditions, including visibility in adverse weather conditions. Review all PPE to ensure it is fit for purpose to protect employees during the cold weather conditions we are currently experiencing. Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) is a particular type of Personal Protective Equipment, used to protect the individual wearer against inhalation of hazardous substances in the workplace air. Employers are required to attempt to eliminate the hazard at source. RPE should only be used after all other reasonably practicable control measures have been taken. PPE is considered a last resort because it only protects individual workers, is prone to failure or misuse, such as wearing the wrong RPE for the job, and employees wearing RPE may get a false sense of security when using RPE.

Live Services - adverse weather conditions can impact the safety of construction sites, and additional safety precautions are critical when working in the vicinity of live services and utilities. If you come across fallen wires or damaged electricity networks, never, ever touch or approach these; if they are LIVE they are extremely dangerous. Please report any damage to the electricity infrastructure by calling 1800 372 999. In cold weather, water pipes are prone to freezing and bursting, it is important to protect outside taps and to insulate exposed pipes and tanks which are particularly vulnerable to freezing. Uisce Éireann have asked people to check for leaks and to turn off water to exterior pipes or unoccupied premises. Customers can contact Uisce Éireann on 1800 278 278 if an issue arises. Similarly, should any gas networks be damaged, please contact Gas Networks Ireland on 1800205050.