

HEALTH SAFETY & WELLBEING ALERT

Risks associated with working in ceiling spaces – including electric shock

OVERVIEW

Ceiling voids in buildings can contain a large number of old and new services, some of which have been present for many years. In addition, ceiling voids by their nature often have limited accessibility and visibility. As such, working in ceiling spaces may expose workers to significant health and safety risks, including electric shock and electrocution.

Work undertaken from within a ceiling cavity is likely to have an increased risk and these risks exist even when the workers body is located outside of the ceiling space. As such, it is important that **all works** within ceiling voids are risk assessed by the person conducting the works and appropriate controls are implemented at all times.

In a recent incident, a contractor who was working from a ladder replacing damaged ceiling tiles. They came into contact with the metal ceiling frame that had been energised by an exposed unterminated electrical cable within the ceiling void and sustained a mild electric shock.

HAZARDS

Serious **electric shocks**, electrocution or burns can be caused by contact with:

- defective or exposed, electrical cables
- exposed terminals or conductors of electrical equipment in the ceiling space e.g. behind light fittings, fans, etc

Other hazards include:

- heat stress
- falls from heights
- dust, asbestos containing materials
- biological hazards such as vermin, insects and mould

ACTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR MANAGING THE RISK

- Undertake a pre-work visual inspection of the ceiling void to identify hazards
- Monash strongly recommends that all contractors undertaking ceiling work (both within and outside of the ceiling cavity) consider the following controls and PPE:
 - Use of fibre-glass ladders
 - Wear insulating/rubber gloves and long sleeve shirts

Other PPE that should be considered for ceiling void works, include:

- dust masks, safety glasses/spectacles
- other essential PPE, as required, including hard hat, safety boots and high-visibility clothing



- **Report any hazards or incidents immediately as outlined below**
- Contractors safety documents e.g. Standard operating procedures, risk assessments, SWMS, JSA should be updated to reflect these requirements. Spot checks will be undertaken by Monash to ensure appropriate controls are in place
- **Please share this safety message with all workers you engage to service Monash**

REPORTING HAZARDS & INCIDENTS:

- Monash University, Health, Safety and Wellbeing team (03) 9022 0222 or ohshelpline@monash.edu
- Buildings and Property Division, including the relevant Service/Contract Manager
- In an Emergency contact 000 and immediately call Monash Security (03) 9905 333

For more information: Please contact the Monash Health Safety & Wellbeing team ohshelpline@monash.edu

Useful links: <https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/preventing-electric-shocks-when-working-ceiling-spaces>