

Retailer hit with fine from Regulator

Supermarket chain Coles is paying \$170,000 in fines to a worker after she fell through a ceiling at their Manly store.

The worker climbed over a handrail in August 2007 to access promotional material being stored on a suspended plasterboard ceiling.

The plasterboard collapsed and she fell more than two metres to the floor below, after which she was taken to hospital and treated for lacerations to her head, whiplash, and bruising.

Coles, which plead guilty, was also ordered to pay WorkCover's legal costs after its investigation found the company knew it was dangerous to use the roof cavity for storage and had built a railing and posted a warning sign.

Despite this, management failed to undertake a risk assessment on the ability of the plasterboard to withstand any weight. They failed to adequately instruct their staff not to access the area or use it for storage.

WorkCover's GM of Work Health and Safety Division, John Watson, said there were a number of simple steps which could have prevented this fall from happening.

"This business employs more 23,000 people in 238 stores across NSW, so the safety procedures of this company are relevant to a lot of people," he said.

"This particular area should never have been allowed to be used to store merchandise and Coles management should have been more vigilant.

"While store management knew the area was not safe, the area was still used for storage and there was no proper information or training given to staff to warn of the risk.

"It is critically important that these types of hazards are identified at the workplace design stage and all reasonable and practicable steps be taken to eliminate the risk of work related injury or illness.

Staff also need to be provided with appropriate training and instruction, and the company provide adequate supervision."

"Following this incident Coles has initiated a number of steps to eliminate re-occurrence, including a new plywood barrier to block off all access to the dangerous area and issuing a safety alert to staff.

"WorkCover is also pleased that this issue has also been addressed in the design of all new Coles stores," Mr Watson said.

Management Liability Insurance can provide cover for events like these, please contact Austbrokers Countrywide for a discussion on the protection you can buy.

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<http://www.insideretail.com.au/IR/IRNews/Hefty-fine-follows-fall-4783.aspx>