

4
November
2022

WSH ALERT

SERIOUS ACCIDENT/ INCIDENT

Worker injured after falling through fragile surface

A worker tried to avoid a waterproof coating that had been applied on a walkway by walking on raised slabs next to the walkway. While crossing the metal decking placed across the raised slabs, the worker lost his balance, fell to his right and stepped on the boarding (a fragile surface) located near the metal decking. The worker fell 4.8m and landed on a metal walkway below. The worker was sent to a nearby hospital and has since recovered.

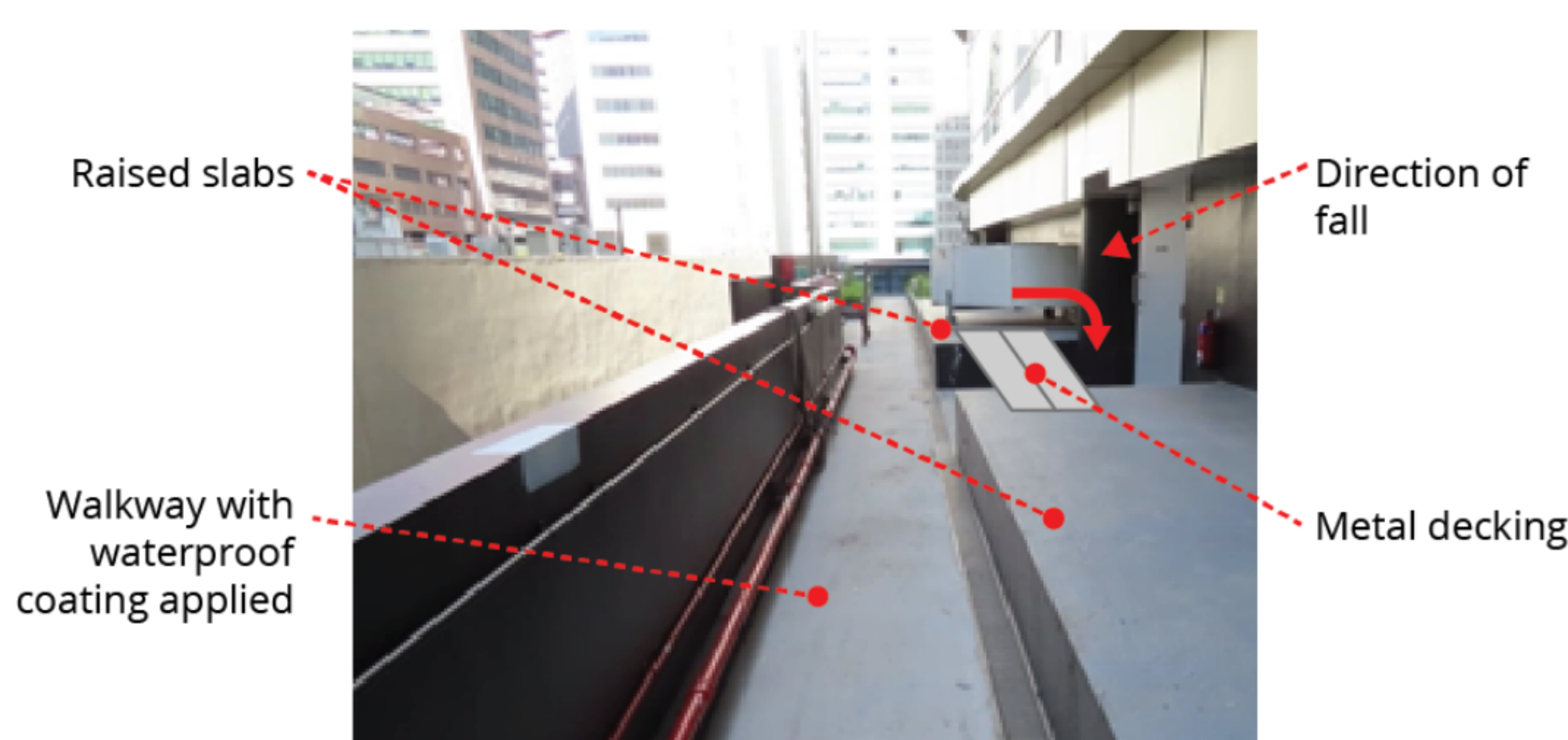


Figure 1: Scene of the incident.



Figure 2: The boarding through which worker fell (left image) and the metal walkway where the worker landed (right image).

Recommendations

Fragile surfaces may look like solid flooring. They are, however, not designed to bear a person's weight, making them a hidden fall-from-height hazard. Recent fatal workplace accidents involving fragile surfaces occurred on [19 May](#), [2 May](#) and [8 April 2022](#).

To prevent similar accidents, consider the following measures:

- Authorised entry:** Allow only authorised workers (including contractors) entry into the work area after they have been briefed on site hazards. Instruct workers to stay on the designated routes at all times due to the presence of fragile surfaces.
- Safe access to work area:** Cordon off walkways that are not to be used and install signs to indicate a safe alternate route. Cover any gaps in the raised slabs with properly secured decking equipped with guard rails to prevent falls.
- Identify fragile surfaces; communicate to all:** Identify, mark and barricade (where possible) all fragile surfaces to alert and prevent any persons from falling through. Display warning signs at entry points to all work areas containing fragile surfaces. Install additional warning signs at the specific location(s) where fragile surfaces are found. Instruct workers never to step directly on fragile surfaces.



Figure 3: Example of hazard communication for fragile surfaces.

- Shorter walkway closure:** Waterproofing materials need to be dried and cured for different durations. When waterproofing common areas, consider using materials that can be cured quickly so that the walkway may be closed for a shorter duration. This will help to reduce the period of exposure to the alternate route which involves crossing near a fragile surface.
- Review for incompatible work:** When reviewing daily permits-to-work, check to ensure that all works happening in the same work area do not create unsafe situations or schedule them to take place in sequence instead of them happening at the same time.

For more information, please refer to WSH Council's [Code of Practice on WSH Risk Management](#) and [Code of Practice for Working Safely at Heights](#).

* Please note that the recommendations provided here are not exhaustive and they are meant to enhance workplace safety and health so that a recurrence may be prevented. The information and recommendations provided are not to be construed as implying liability on any party nor should it be taken to encapsulate all the responsibilities and obligations under the law.

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