



ROPE ACCESS WINDOW CLEANING & MAINTENANCE ARE YOUR WORKS COMPLIANT?

Those who commission works utilising rope access techniques in various applications often don't realise the issues for which they are (and remain) responsible.

This document is not designed to scare, but to assist persons to understand their responsibilities and to show how easily they can be managed.

Window cleaning and other light maintenance works are generally requested by the building manager or the body corporate. In both cases, they often don't understand what is needed and rely on the operator to tell them. In most cases, this is fine, however there are unscrupulous operators who will not always tell the full story – this document seeks to fill the gaps!

REGULATIONS

Every Australian State has Regulations requiring the employer (or person in charge of the site including the body corporate) to ensure a safe work place. These Regs are often backed by specific requirements for working at heights and often then refer to Codes of Practice, Australian Standards and Industry bodies such as ARAA (Australian Rope Access Association, the peak body for rope access in Australia) for advice on how to comply.

These Regulations are LAW and can be used in a prosecution should an incident happen on your site. The Building Manager or Body Corporate may be seen to be in control of the site even when the works are subcontracted out.

ADVICE DOCUMENTS

There is an Australian/New Zealand Standard for Rope access (AS/NZS 4488, parts 1 & 2) and also an ISO Standard (ISO 22846-1). The ARAA has been a contributor to both these documents and actively promote their requirements.

The ARAA has several documents available (free off the ARAA web site, www.araa.net.au) to provide guidance. These cover issues such as safe operating procedures, anchor design and installation, site check lists, site classifications etc. You are urged to download these and to use them where required.

OPERATOR QUALIFICATIONS

The ARAA runs a 3 level competency system with operators required to regularly upgrade their skills. A UK body, IRATA has a similar system and systems also exist in many countries such as USA, Germany, South Africa, New Zealand, parts of Europe etc.

There is simply no excuse for operators not to hold recognised qualifications when carrying out works on your building. You should check the qualifications are suitable (contact ARAA for assistance), are current and are the correct level for the works to be undertaken (see below under supervision). Ensure also that their qualifications are at a suitable level – if the course they did was 1-2 days, they are NOT qualified for your project!

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Ask to copy their qualification card as part of your process of control on works being undertaken on your site – follow the golden rule, “no ticket, no start”! It’s simply sensible business.

SUPERVISION

The minimum level operator who can supervise a project under the ARAA recommendations is a Level 2, and then only on simple projects. Projects that are technical, construction sites or remoter sites are automatically classified as “advanced” sites and must be run by a Level 3 operator. This person has adequate skills to properly assess risks, operator qualifications and can run a rescue should this be necessary. Before allowing works to be undertaken on your site, ask for a copy of the risk assessment AND the rescue plan. Again, it’s good business to ensure these docs have been carried out for your site.

OH&S

Ensuring that OH&S issues are properly addressed involves management and supervision. Providing these costs money and if you simply chose the cheapest price every time, without checking what stands behind the price, you risk compromising this area in particular – however should an incident occur, the small cost saving will look insignificant very quickly! We suggest you deal with a professional who can demonstrate their compliance with all requirements to you and who are happy to provide you with relevant documentation copies (see checklist at end)

RISK ASSESSMENT

As mentioned above, all jobs require at least a risk assessment to be carried out. Some need more documentation (ie. Construction sites) As for copies – it’s good protection.

CONSTRUCTION SITE

A number of States now classify some works as “construction” even though they may not be on actual construction sites. Many repairs and maintenance tasks now fall into this area. Qld, Vic and NSW are all States that now have requirements in this area and if you are in charge of the works, it’s YOUR responsibility to ensure that the additional requirements that are required to be carried out, in fact ARE. Contact your local regulatory body office for info – they are pleased to assist with compliance issues, preferring to prevent issues than investigating them afterwards!

ANCHORS

The ARAA has an Industry Code and a compliance pack available for anchor installations. Both are free, available off the web site and offer practical advice on how to design, install, maintain and use anchor systems correctly.

WORK AT HEIGHTS

Often, working at heights involves more than just rope access and may incorporate other harness works, elevating work platforms, scaffolds, ladders, exposed edges and the like. All of these areas have issues that you need to be aware of. The ARAA is happy to assist with advice, as are the regulatory authorities. Private Consultants are also an excellent source of non commercially biased information.

PUBLIC PROTECTION

Works that happen over or around the public MUST give high priority to protection for the public. While the operators should undertake this work correctly, it is the overall responsibility of the building manager /

body corporate to ensure this is done, and done correctly. Again, the ARAA, regulators and codes of practices, Standards and the like are good places to start for guidance. Local councils also often have specific requirements.

INSURANCES

Using an uninsured cleaning contractor is simply dangerous. Inevitably, they may be cheaper but there are some good reasons. Firstly, the saving of not being insured is passed onto the building manager but so is the liability if they have an incident. The ARAA has arranged some excellent terms for rope access operators insurance. If they are not insured, be VERY careful. Additionally, if the contractor takes on the role of designer or installer (say for the anchors) he will also likely require Professional Indemnity (PI) insurance. If it's not in place, ask yourself why, and who will be responsible if there are later issues.

CHECKLIST FOR ROPE ACCESS WORKS ON YOUR SITE

Attached is a site checklist developed jointly by the ARAA and WorkCover Vic for use by the Building Manager, Body Corporate and rope access team.

This may form the basis of what you should be ensuring is managed on YOUR site. Remember also that there may be other specifics relating to your site, however this checklist is an excellent place to start.

We suggest you request to see copies of documentation and keep these on record to demonstrate your overview of the works.

ASSOCIATION OVERVIEW

The ARAA is a non profit body in place to ensure our industry remains safe and professional. Advice and assistance is always available and many members are now forming links with the ARAA where their business practices are overviewed by the ARAA so that clients have an additional level of comfort about who they allow to work on their building.

If you have any doubts about the works on your site or the contractor, contact the ARAA for assistance.

