

Australia: Worker seriously injured in four-storey fall in south Sydney

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A Sydney worker was rushed to hospital in a critical condition on Saturday, after falling four storeys and sustaining a head injury.

Coming just eight days after the tragic death of stonemason Alistair Bidmead at Fort Street High School in the city's inner west, the accident again raises the dangerous conditions confronted by workers every day.

The 32-year-old worker was painting the 16-metre-high eaves of an Allawah, south Sydney, apartment block when the elevated work platform (EWP) he was using overturned just after 12:30 p.m.

A resident of the building, Andrew Kollington, told *World Socialist Web Site* reporters he had been reading in bed, "cursing the beeping machine" as the work carried on outside his unit throughout the morning.

Kollington then heard a loud bang and opened his blinds to the shocking sight of the "cherry picker" overturned in the driveway, with the worker still inside the cage. He immediately called 000 and ran outside to help the worker. "I think I was there in 45 seconds," he said.

Grateful for the first aid training he had received from Surf Life Saving Australia, Kollington said the worker was unresponsive, bleeding from the head, and that his breathing was "problematic." After clearing his airway and placing him in the "recovery position," he monitored the man's condition until the paramedics arrived.

He said that while the worker was not conscious, he was moving, and Kollington tried to keep him still, concerned that he would suffer further injuries.

Kollington said he was the only person on the scene for around four minutes, until another man came to assist. While the ambulance only took seven minutes to arrive, Kollington said it felt like "forever," feeling the

weight of responsibility for the worker's life.

After they arrived on the scene, paramedics put the worker in an induced coma before transporting him to the nearby St George Hospital.

Fire and Rescue workers took several hours to stabilise the cherry picker in order to safely remove it from the site. Residents told the WSWs that the EWP remained in the driveway until the early hours of Sunday morning.

While no one saw the lift collapse, Kollington noted afterward that the "legs [outriggers] were not folded out." Media photographs of the accident scene appear to confirm his recollection. These hydraulic outriggers are used on mobile EWPs to provide a stable base and reduce the chances of the machine overbalancing.

Another resident pointed to the broader issues of safety and supervision on work sites. He said: "Companies need to see safety as more important than reducing costs. They need to have enough people to supervise, to ensure that work areas meet safety standards."

He also stated that the painting work had been underway since mid-May, but had suffered major delays because of rain.

Under conditions of the rapidly rising cost of living, and with major disruptions over the past two-and-a-half years due to COVID-19 and supply shortages, as well as the weather, tradespeople have come under increasing financial pressure.

As was the case in Bidmead's death, the incident appears to have been forgotten by the corporate media since the initial coverage, expressing the indifference of the political establishment to the lives of the working class.

This includes the unions. The Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU),

which covers workers in the construction industry, has not said a word about either incident.

The fact is, the CFMMEU, along with other unions, has played the critical role in enforcing unsafe working conditions in the construction industry and more broadly throughout the building trades.

According to Safe Work Australia, incidents relating to EWPs resulted in at least nine fatalities and 355 workers' compensation claims around the country between 2015 and 2019.

A "Falls from Heights Blitz" conducted by SafeWork New South Wales (NSW) in October 2019 issued more than 250 notices pertaining to fall risks and scaffolding issues. At 38 percent of sites visited in Sydney, inspectors did not find "evidence of training for the use of harnesses and associated equipment." At 12 percent of sites, EWP operators did not hold the appropriate licences.

SafeWork NSW declined to comment on Saturday's incident, because it was under investigation. This will amount to another whitewash, doing nothing to hold those responsible to account or improve safety for workers.

Workplace safety issues will never be addressed while it is in the hands of the unions and these government safety bodies, which exist to conceal the root cause of dangerous working conditions, the prioritisation of corporate profit over workers' health and safety.

The WSWS urges workers and others with further information about this incident or other workplace accidents and safety concerns, to contact us today.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)