

SWMS Pre-Start Checklist

Three checks before high risk construction work starts · Australia · current at September 2026

Job / site: _____ Date: _____ Completed by: _____

Part 1 — Do you need a SWMS for this job?

A SWMS is required if the work hits ANY high risk construction work (HRCW) category. Common electrical triggers:

- ☐ Work on or near energised electrical installations or services (this alone triggers a SWMS)
- ☐ Risk of a person falling more than 2 m — roofs, ladders, EWPs, mezzanines (SA: 2 m from 1 July 2026)
- ☐ Work in or near a confined space — and check ceiling spaces against the definition
- ☐ A shaft or trench deeper than 1.5 m, or a tunnel
- ☐ Likely disturbance of asbestos (old switchboards, meter panels, eaves)
- ☐ Work near powered mobile plant, or on or next to a road or railway in use
- ☐ Work near pressurised gas mains or chemical, fuel or refrigerant lines
- ☐ Demolition of a load-bearing element, or structural work needing temporary support
- ☐ Checked the full HRCW list — 18 model-law categories (19 in Victoria) — for anything else

No category hit → no SWMS required (general risk-management duties still apply). Any hit → continue to Part 2.

Part 2 — Is the SWMS document right?

The things principal contractors actually reject SWMS for:

- ☐ Correct state version — a Victorian job on a Victorian-law SWMS, not a re-headed model-law template
- ☐ Site-specific — this job's address, this job's hazards, no leftovers from another job (the #1 rejection reason)
- ☐ Header complete — company, ABN, licence no., principal contractor, supervisor + phone, site address, date
- ☐ Every applicable HRCW category ticked — and none that don't apply
- ☐ Each task linked to its own hazards and controls — not hazards grouped in a lump
- ☐ Controls follow the hierarchy of control — elimination and engineering before admin controls and PPE
- ☐ A named responsible person against each control
- ☐ Consultation recorded — workers (and in VIC, HSRs) consulted, and the record filled in, not blank
- ☐ Worker sign-off table completed before work starts
- ☐ Review section filled in — who reviews, what triggers a review, review date
- ☐ No padding — no legislation extracts or risk matrices; regulators say they don't belong in a SWMS
- ☐ Dated and version-numbered, superseded versions kept

Part 3 — On the day

- ☐ SWMS on site and readable where the work is being done
- ☐ Copy given to the principal contractor before starting (construction projects)
- ☐ Pre-start / toolbox talk done and the crew signed on today
- ☐ Everyone doing the work has read and understood the controls — including new starters and subbies
- ☐ Controls actually in place as written — isolation applied, barriers up, spotter present
- ☐ Anything changed? New hazard, new method, new conditions, an incident → stop, review and revise first

Reminder: Work must be carried out in accordance with the SWMS. If it isn't, stop until the work matches the SWMS or the SWMS is revised to match reality.