

## SAFETY ALERT

# Working on vehicles with air-suspension systems

The purpose of this alert is to outline the potential for crush injuries when working on vehicles with air-suspension systems.

### Background

An apprentice mechanic, working underneath a bus, received crush injuries when a leak in the air-suspension system caused the bus to lower unexpectedly. The apprentice was replacing a steering dampener, and had performed this task previously using a maintenance pit. On this occasion, the pit was unavailable.

In an attempt to free the trapped apprentice, other workers activated the ignition, which initially caused the bus to lower further before raising automatically.

### Contributing factors

Initial investigations by WorkCover indicate the following factors contributed to the incident:

- The bus had an air-suspension system that lets the bus lower when air is released.
- Supports were not used to prevent the bus lowering.
- The task had been performed from the maintenance pit on previous occasions, but the apprentice and other workers may have been unfamiliar with safe work methods required when the pit was not used.

### Occupational Health and Safety requirements

The *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000* requires employers and those in control of workplaces to take all necessary steps to ensure that safe work systems are established and maintained, and that all staff are adequately informed, trained and supervised.

Clauses 9 to 12 of the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation 2001* place specific obligations on the employer to manage the risk of any foreseeable hazard that may arise in their workplace.

### Actions required

Air-suspension systems may lower for various reasons – eg an air leak, a change in the level of the vehicle (eg when jacking), when the ignition is turned on, when a suspension sensor is removed, or when an apparently unrelated control is activated (eg a kneeling bus may automatically lower when the door is opened).

Those who operate, service, maintain, repair or retrieve vehicles with air-suspension systems should be aware of the risks that arise when the system lowers unexpectedly. They should implement measures to ensure the safety of workers at all times – and advise all workers of these control measures. One measure could include not going under a vehicle with an air-suspension system unless it is supported against lowering, another could be releasing all air pressure and deactivating the system before work begins.

Caution is essential when a change in work processes or the working environment occurs – eg as in this instance, when the task was performed on a flat floor rather than the maintenance pit, when a breakdown occurs in the field, or when the vehicle is being towed. In these circumstances risk assessments should be reviewed and, if necessary, new control measures implemented before work commences.

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## Further information

- *Safe recovery (and repair) of buses and coaches fitted with air suspension*, Guidance note PM85, Health and Safety Executive, UK <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/pm85.pdf>
- *Risk management at work* (catalogue no. WC00425).

Also, visit [workcover.nsw.gov.au](http://workcover.nsw.gov.au) or phone **13 10 50**.

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Information on the latest laws can be checked by visiting the NSW legislation website ([www.legislation.nsw.gov.au](http://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au)).

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Website [workcover.nsw.gov.au](http://workcover.nsw.gov.au)

ISBN 978 1 74218 962 8 ©Copyright WorkCover NSW 1011