Frameless glass balustrades (eg those used around voids in shopping centres and apartment balconies) are typically made from toughened glass. However, due to residual internal stresses from the manufacturing process, the edges of these glass panels can be vulnerable to breakage or shattering from a relatively minor impact.

A failure of this type can potentially expose workers to a risk of falling from height and also expose persons below to a risk of being struck by glass shards or fragments resulting in serious or fatal injuries.

**Control measures**

As an employer you must, so far as is reasonably practicable, provide and maintain a working environment that is safe and without risks to the health and safety of your employees.

You have a general duty to address the following risks during installation of glass balustrades and ongoing building construction activities:

- glass balustrade failure from a relatively minor edge impact
- the subsequent hazard of falling objects
- the subsequent hazard of people falling from heights.

**Protecting workers during balustrade installation**

The following measures should be used by employers to control the above risks and protect the balustrade during installation:

- **Ensure** your employees are protected from the risk of falling during installation works. Depending on the circumstances of the installation, this may include providing a temporary work platform, guard railing, travel restraint system or other safety harness type system. *Glass balustrades should not be relied upon as perimeter fall protection.*

- **Store** and **handle** all toughened glass panels in accordance with any manufacturer’s instructions or in a way that will prevent edge damage to the glass.

- **Prevent** glass shards or fragments falling in the event of a breakage by, for example, using appropriately placed and secured canvas catch sheets. Appropriate ‘no go’ or exclusion zones should be maintained during installation works with the assistance of spotters.

- **Provide** the necessary information, instruction, training and supervision to all employees undertaking the installation works (including safe handling and storage of glass panels).

- **Ensure** personal protective equipment (PPE) is worn, including safety glasses, full face visors, wrist guards and/or gloves.

- **Consider** the use of ongoing glass edge protection such as split rubber or plastic tubing, grooved timber, moulded plastic strip etc., at least until the practical completion of the area in question.

Employers must also consult with their employees about health and safety matters that may directly affect them.

**Protecting workers during ongoing building construction activity**

Due to the heavy industrial nature of construction work there is always the risk of edge damage to glass balustrades from
plant, machinery, tools and debris – which could expose workers to a fall risk. Because of this risk, glass balustrades should not be relied upon as perimeter fall protection during construction. Temporary construction guardrails, or other means of perimeter fall protection, should stay in place until all construction work is completed.

Further information

WorkSafe guidance
Guidance Note Safe installation of glass facades
Compliance Code Prevention of falls in general construction
Code of Practice Prevention of falls in housing construction

Standards

Contact Details
Call us on: 1800 136 089
Email us at: info@worksafe.vic.gov.au
For more information on occupational health and safety, go to WorkSafe’s website: worksafe.vic.gov.au

Note: This guidance material has been prepared using the best information available to the Victorian WorkCover Authority, and should be used for general use only. Any information about legislative obligations or responsibilities included in this material is only applicable to the circumstances described in the material. You should always check the legislation referred to in this material and make your own judgement about what action you may need to take to ensure you have complied with the law. Accordingly, the Victorian WorkCover Authority cannot be held responsible and extends no warranties as to the suitability of the information for your specific circumstances; or actions taken by third parties as a result of information contained in the guidance material.

On 18 June 2017, the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017 (OHS Regulations 2017) replaced the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007 (OHS Regulations 2007), which expired on this date. This publication has not yet been updated to reflect the changes introduced by the OHS Regulations 2017 and should not be relied upon as a substitute for legal advice.

Information on the key changes introduced by the OHS 2017 Regulations can be found in the guidance titled Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017: Summary of changes - available at https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/207659/ISBN-OHS-regulations-summary-of-changes-2017-04.pdf. However, this guidance document contains material of a general nature only and is not to be used as a substitute for obtaining legal advice.