Australia: 15-year-old boy killed at Melbourne factory

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A 15-year-old boy was killed in a horrific workplace incident at a precast concrete factory in Melbourne's southeast suburb of Dandenong South last Thursday.

According to WorkSafe Victoria, at around 10:45 a.m., the boy "was fixing defects on a precast concrete panel when an adjacent panel weighing more than two tonnes fell onto him."

Emergency services, including multiple ambulances, police and firefighters, rushed to the factory. Paramedics attempted to save the boy, but he died at the scene.

According to 7News, the concrete panel had been standing upright before it fell. Several other workers were nearby, with many reportedly taking their morning break when the incident occurred.

The identity of the young worker has not been publicly released. Nor have authorities or the company explained the circumstances in which a boy of just 15 came to be working on multi-tonne concrete panels in a factory, what his employment status was, how long he had worked there or what training and supervision he had received.

The company operating the Dandenong South factory has not been publicly identified in official statements or initial media reports. The company reportedly declined to comment on Thursday while WorkSafe investigators were at the premises.

WorkSafe has announced an investigation but has released no further information about why the panel fell or the conditions at the factory.

The death comes less than 10 months after another incident with disturbing parallels. 15-year-old worker, Beau Bradford, was killed on a worksite in Surfers Paradise on Queensland's Gold Coast.

Bradford was working at the property at around 7 a.m. on December 1, 2025 when he suffered severe injuries. The Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU) said it had been informed that the teenager had been struck by a falling object. Bradford was rushed to Gold Coast University Hospital but died later that day.

The two deaths underscore the dangers confronting young and inexperienced workers who are placed in potentially hazardous workplaces.

In February, WorkSafe Victoria revealed that more than 3,000 injury claims involving apprentices had been accepted in the state since the beginning of 2021. Young workers, including apprentices, face their greatest danger during their first six months in a job, principally because of their lack of experience and unfamiliarity with the work.

Over the previous five years, WorkSafe had prosecuted 66 companies over safety breaches that injured apprentices or exposed them to serious risks, resulting in $7.38 million in fines, court costs and enforceable undertakings. Nine prosecutions, involving five fatal incidents, resulted in $3.21 million in fines.

Falls from heights alone accounted for 410 apprentice injury claims. WorkSafe prosecuted 38 cases involving falls, which had left apprentices with injuries including fractured skulls, bleeding on the brain, traumatic brain injuries, spinal and vertebral damage and broken bones.

Individual cases give some indication of the horrific injuries suffered by young workers.

In 2016, a 17-year-old apprentice plumber, just 18 days into his job, was partially buried when an excavation collapsed at a townhouse construction site in Canterbury. The teenager suffered two collapsed lungs, 12 broken ribs, a fractured sternum and shoulder and damage to his pancreas. A geotechnical report had classified the site as at high risk from abnormal moisture conditions.

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In October 2023, a 17-year-old first-year apprentice was welding a metal footing cage at a factory in Kyabram when sparks ignited his clothing. Unable to extinguish the flames by rolling on the ground, the teenager ran back into the factory still on fire before other workers put out the flames with a hose.

He was airlifted to Melbourne, spent a month in hospital and underwent multiple operations, including skin grafts to his stomach, chest, arms, neck, back, buttocks and hips. Just a month before the incident, the same apprentice's hoodie had been burned while he was carrying out another welding task. The employer was eventually fined $30,000 for failing to provide a safe system of work and necessary supervision.

In another incident in 2025, an apprentice fell 4.7 metres at a Camberwell residential construction site. There was no safe access point to a hanging bracket scaffold, and the apprentice stood on a nailed timber guardrail to reach it. The guardrail partially detached and he fell.

Such incidents are not aberrations. Construction accounted for 61 percent of all Victorian apprentice injury claims over the five years to 2026 and almost 70 percent of WorkSafe prosecutions involving apprentices.

Despite their particular vulnerability, young workers have limited additional legal protection. Victoria imposes restrictions on children under 15, who cannot perform work that is not "light work," operate heavy machinery or work on building and construction sites.

But once a young person turns 15, these specific child-employment restrictions no longer apply. Victorian government guidance states that from that age a teenager can legally work in any kind of job, provided they are appropriately qualified and the work does not breach other laws applying to young people.

Thus, a 15-year-old can legally enter industries and workplaces from which a 14-year-old is specifically excluded, despite the heightened dangers confronting inexperienced young workers.

The Victorian Labor government has been in office continuously since 2014. It oversees the lax regulatory framework that has allowed the horrific accidents to continue, in line with its character as a party of big business.

The trade union bureaucracies collaborate closely with the Labor government. While routinely invoking workplace safety, they accept the framework in which management retains control over production and workers are left dependent upon employers, union-management structures and government regulators to determine whether workplaces are safe.

Workers cannot rely on such an investigation to provide a full accounting of the circumstances responsible for the teenager's death. WorkSafe is not an organisation controlled by workers but an agency of the Victorian state. Workplace deaths can be followed by lengthy investigations and prosecutions resulting in fines years after the event, without placing control over safety in workers' hands.

The teenager was the 34th worker confirmed by WorkSafe to have been killed at work in Victoria so far this year.

The defence of safety and all other conditions depends on workers forming their own rank-and-file committees, independent of the government, the union bureaucracy and the regulatory authorities.

Such committees must not only enforce safety on the job, in opposition to management, and organise independent investigations into tragedies such as the one in Melbourne. They must form part of a broader political movement of the working class, based on a socialist program that rejects the subordination of all aspects of society, including workers' safety and lives, to profit.

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