

The New Zealand Workplace Health and Safety Awards:

Golden Homes and Workdek NZ

Category: Organisational / Category 1: Safety

Golden Homes and Workdek NZ:

Embedding a prevention-first approach to working at height across a national residential building network

Golden Homes is one of New Zealand's leading group home builders, operating nationally through a network of regional licencees and partners. As a market leader in residential construction, Golden Homes recognised both an opportunity and a responsibility to lift safety standards across its sites, particularly in relation to one of the sector's most persistent risks: falls from height.

What specific issue or problem did the organisation face?

Golden Homes identified falls from height as a material and ongoing risk on residential building sites. WorkSafe notes that residential building sites account for more injuries than any other workplace in the construction sector. It also reports that more than 50% of falls are from less than three metres, and approximately 70% involve ladders and roofs. These figures show that serious harm in residential construction often arises during everyday tasks, not only at extreme heights.

Golden Homes recognised that traditional methods of working at height continued to expose builders to avoidable risk during framing, truss installation and related work. Workers were often required to operate from ladders, narrow top plates, or above internal safety nets. While these approaches may provide a level of protection, they do not remove the need for workers to perform physically demanding tasks in unstable and awkward positions. As a PCBU, Golden Homes saw an opportunity to pursue a better solution.

What solution did the organisation come up with?

Golden Homes partnered with Workdek NZ to test whether modular internal safety platforms could improve both safety and productivity on live residential building sites.

This was more than a product trial. Golden Homes tested the system in a real operating environment, assessed its practical impact on builders and site workflow, and then made

the decision to embed safety decking into its construction methodology. Following successful in-market testing, safety platforms were incorporated into Golden Homes' method statements for relevant site activities. This marked a shift from trial to standard practice.

The initiative continued to evolve through collaboration between Golden Homes and Workdek, with further refinements identified to improve on-site usability and productivity, including adjustments such as lowering braces and improving handling efficiency.

When did work on this initiative start?

The initiative commenced in mid-2024 and has been actively rolled out over the past 18 months. It began with live site testing and evaluation, before progressing into wider implementation and formal incorporation into Golden Homes' site methods. Over that period, the use of safety decking has expanded across the Golden Homes licensee network as confidence in the safety and productivity benefits of the system has grown.

What evidence is there that the initiative has been successful?

The clearest evidence of success is that Golden Homes moved from testing the system to adopting it across its licensee network. This shows the initiative was practical, credible and effective enough to justify changing standard site practice.

Golden Homes' experience has shown that safety platforms improve footing, create a more stable working environment, and reduce the need for workers to operate in awkward and physically demanding positions while carrying out elevated tasks. The system has also reduced the risk of tools and materials falling between floor levels and created a safer, more practical environment for supervising, training and managing apprentices on site.

Importantly, the initiative has shown that stronger safety outcomes do not have to come at the expense of commercial practicality. Golden Homes identified that safety decking could also improve productivity by creating a more efficient working platform, improving workflow, and reducing friction associated with traditional methods. This has been critical in supporting adoption across a licensee model.

Observed benefits have included:

- safer internal access and footing during framing and truss work
- reduced exposure to fall-from-height hazards
- fewer awkward postures and less physical strain on builders
- reduced risk of tools and materials falling to workers below

- a more controlled environment for supervising and training apprentices
- stronger confidence among crews working at height
- improved site productivity and workflow
- greater consistency in safer work methods across the network

What learning took place?

A key learning for Golden Homes was that meaningful safety improvement in residential construction often requires a change in work method, not simply an added layer of protection. By trialling, and then standardising internal safety platforms, Golden Homes demonstrated that the industry does not have to accept unsafe or uncomfortable working positions as inevitable.

A second learning was that real safety leadership in a licensee model requires the head organisation to set the expectation and create the framework for safer work. Golden Homes did not leave individual licensees to solve this independently. It recognised its PCBU responsibilities and used its scale and influence to test, validate and implement a better approach.

A further learning has been that implementation at network scale requires ongoing verification, not just initial rollout. Golden Homes has identified the next phase of improvement as introducing a regular audit process to ensure the new methods remain embedded, to identify opportunities for refinement, and to capture learnings from sites over time.

Why this initiative deserves recognition

Golden Homes' initiative goes beyond compliance. It represents a deliberate decision by a national residential builder to challenge accepted practice and replace a reactive approach to fall protection with a prevention-focused method. It is credible because it has been tested and embedded in live operations. It reduces risk by giving builders a safer and more stable working platform. It is innovative in its application across a national licensee network. And it has wider relevance because the same risks exist across residential building throughout New Zealand.

Importantly, the initiative has delivered benefits beyond direct fall prevention. It has reduced the risk of tools and materials falling between floor levels and created a more practical environment for supervising, training and managing apprentices. This means the initiative is not only improving immediate site safety, but also helping build stronger safety behaviours and expectations for the next generation of workers.

Most importantly, it shows what good safety leadership looks like in practice: a PCBU recognising a persistent risk, taking responsibility for change, partnering with an innovative supplier, and using its influence to lift standards across an entire network.

Summary:

Golden Homes has shown that safer residential building does not require accepting slower or more difficult work. By partnering with Workdek NZ, testing the solution in practice, and then embedding safety platforms into its construction methods, Golden Homes has shifted its licensee network toward a more prevention-focused approach to working at height. The result has been safer footing, improved builder confidence, reduced physical strain, stronger apprentice supervision, and productivity benefits. With a regular audit process identified as the next step, Golden Homes is demonstrating that this is not a one-off change, but an ongoing commitment to lifting safety performance across its national network.

Supporting Evidence:



https://youtu.be/_HY7sEtyUGI



<https://youtu.be/ujc5qfXPkJU>