

Safety Alert

Date: March 2026

Supporting video: resources.nsw.gov.au/sa26-02-video

Fall from excavator breaks worker's legs

This safety alert provides safety advice for the NSW mining industry.

Issue

A worker suffered significant injuries in a fall of about 4 metres while cleaning an excavator in the NSW Hunter Valley.

Figure 1: Hitachi 5600-6 Excavator EX316 with failed guardrail/gate assembly



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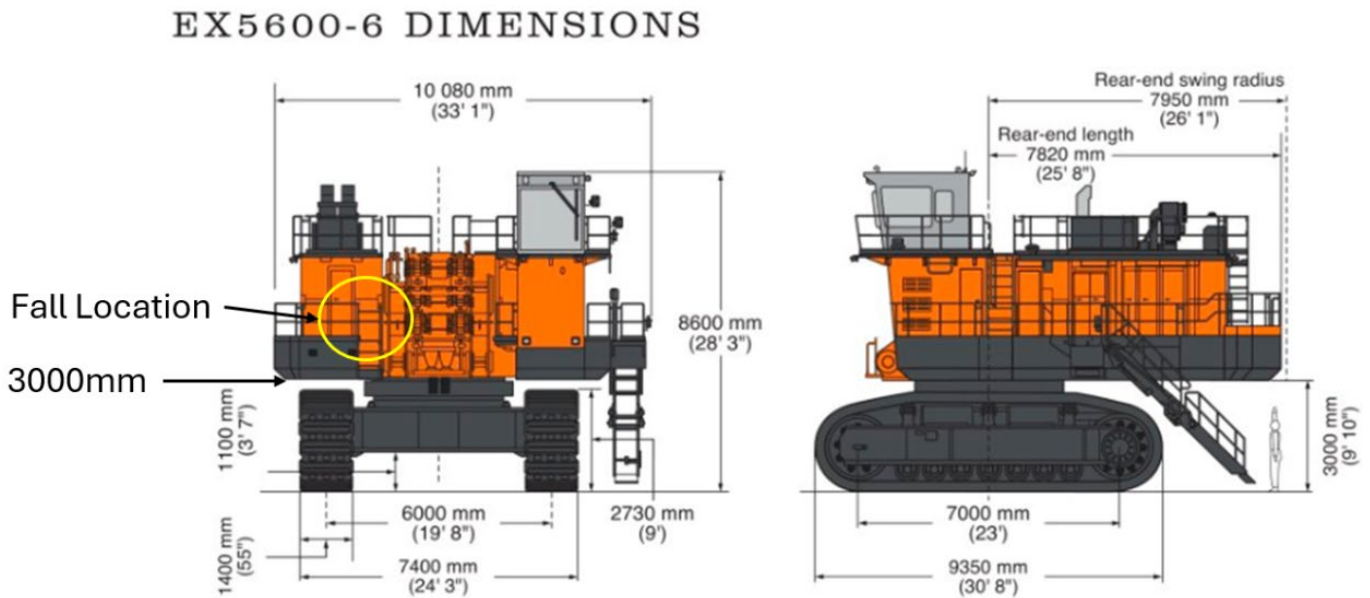
Circumstances

A contractor was pressure washing near the right-hand boom cylinder on a platform at the front of the EX5600-6 about 5:20 am on 22 September 2025. While cleaning the boom cylinder mount, and in contact with the access ladder gate, the stanchion post failed at the base, and the worker fell to the ground. The worker suffered multiple fractures to the legs, and other injuries.

Investigation

The failed section of guardrail/gate was adjacent to the right hand boom cylinder and also supported an aftermarket access platform.

Figure 2: Fall location and dimensions of Hitachi EX5600-6



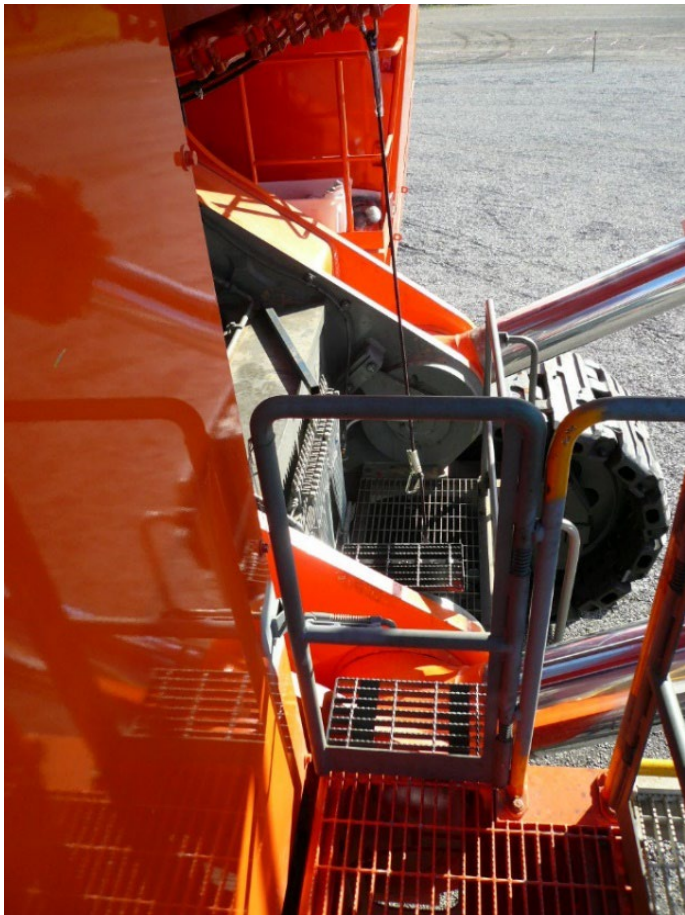
The following factors contributed to the incident:

1. Modifications to the access platform from the original equipment manufacturer’s (OEM) design resulted the removal of one of the two stanchion posts.
2. Change Management when installing the aftermarket folding maintenance access platform did not adequately consider the structural impact of removing the adjacent guardrail stanchion.
3. Guardrail design did not meet the requirements of AS 5327 Earthmoving machinery access systems.
4. The location of the worker relative to the stanchion post and the load applied to the gate.
5. A crack or weld flaw in the weld attaching the gate stanchion post to the base plate allowed the gate stanchion post to fail when the worker put weight on it.
6. Although the machine was inspected each shift by operators, fortnightly by maintenance workers during planned maintenance, and three-monthly structural integrity inspections, these failed to identify the weld crack/flaw.

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7. The platform gate and ladder for maintenance access were positioned where rocks regularly impacted the excavator structure. At the time of the incident, the ladder was damaged and missing at least 2 lower rungs, although the ladder had not been placed out of service.

Figure 3: Original OEM guardrail and gate assembly during machine commissioning



Two stanchion
guardrail supporting
access gates

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Figure 4: Location of failed handrail section on the excavator



Regulator action

Scene preservation and improvement notices were issued on the mine.

Recommendations

Mine operators, excavator suppliers, and people modifying plant should consider:

1. inspections and associated defect management of access gates, guardrail systems, and ladder handrails
2. design specifications for access gates, guardrail systems, and ladder handrails
3. suitability of access gates, guardrail systems, and ladder handrail locations with regard to ongoing operational damage
4. management of change where modification to guard railing and access systems associated with working at heights is being considered
5. failure modes of support stanchions or posts and processes to assess the weld quality between the support stanchions or posts and base plates
6. risk management, such as job hazard analysis (JHA), Take 5, work authorisation documentation, for completeness and suitability
7. engineering verification of completed modifications
8. management of excavator pre-maintenance cleaning processes
9. control of the access point and use by workers

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10. using the investigation results/recommendations to develop and implement safe systems of work to manage the risks associated with workers falling when working with, and in the vicinity of, gates, stanchions or posts and access ladders.

Note: Please ensure all relevant people in your organisation receive a copy of this safety alert and are informed of its content and recommendations. This safety alert should be processed in a systematic manner through the mine's information and communication process. It should also be placed on the mine's common area, such as your notice board where appropriate.

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Document control	
CM10 reference	D25/130656
Mine safety reference	SA26-02
Date published	9 March 2026
Authorised by	Chief Inspector Office of the Chief Inspector