

TOOLBOX TALK NO.45

Mobile Elevated Working Platforms



Falls from working at height still remain the largest cause of fatal and major accidents in the construction industry. Many falls are from less than 2 metres high. Many accidents are caused by the poor selection and use of access equipment, or because no fall prevention measures were provided.

The Work at Height Regulations 2005 require an assessment to be carried out before starting any work at height. If the assessment determines that the work can be carried out in a way that avoids having someone working at height then this must be done.

When choosing the most suitable work equipment, you must follow the fall protection hierarchy. This states the order in which protective measures should be considered to prevent and mitigate the risks when working at height cannot be avoided.

Easily moved from place to place, MEWPs are particularly suitable for short duration tasks requiring a work platform. Work platforms may be towable units, lorry or trailer mounter or self-propelled. MEWPs are classified as lifting equipment within the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations (LOLER)

Storage/charging area

- Wherever possible, keep MEWPs in a secure compound or in a designated area with the engine or motor switched off, the working platform lowered to its parked position and the brakes applied. If it has to be parked on a gradient, the wheels should be chocked.
- Recharging electrically powered MEWPs should be carried out in an area that is protected from the elements.
- It is the MEWP user's responsibility to make sure that the MEWP cannot be used by unauthorised persons.

Falling from the platform

One of the biggest risks when using boom-type platforms is being thrown out of the basket if the boom swings, jolts or tilts away from the machine's centre of gravity (this can occur when travelling in a MEWP), or if the operator overreaches (usually by standing on the guard rails). Other causes can be impact by other vehicles or snagging the boom or basket on obstructions.

Where there is a risk of impact or someone falling from a boom-type MEWP, those people should wear appropriate fall prevention equipment. The preferred option is to stop the person falling from the work platform by using a work restraint system. A work restraint system should normally consist of a full-body harness (BS EN 361) connected to a lanyard (BS EN 354) which is connected to an anchor point on the MEWP basket. **From the anchor point, the lanyard length should be short enough to prevent a person reaching a position where they could fall.** The lanyard may contain an energy-absorbing device (BS EN 355), but should still only be used as part of a work restraint system.

Do not use retractable type fall arresters.

Overhead hazards

Look for any overhead hazards such as power lines, steel beams, pipe bridges, arches or trees and take account of any risks they present and any control measures needed.

**SAFETY AS
STANDARD**

Site traffic and personnel

1. Think about how the MEWP interacts with other site traffic and personnel.
2. Does the operator have limited visibility, particularly during reversing? Is a banksman required?
3. What is required in terms of vehicle route signage, pedestrian and vehicle segregation barriers, cones, crossings etc.?
4. Is there a risk of trapping other workers between the counterweight and an adjacent structure during slewing?
5. Are people below protected from the risk of objects falling from the basket? The first priority should be to keep people out of the area but, if it is necessary to have people working in an area where they could be at risk of being struck by a falling object, you must put control measures in place, e.g. tool lanyards.
6. When working in an area used by other workers or vehicles, the entire MEWP work area (based on required outreach distances and not just base structure footprint) should be barricaded using cones and warning signs.
7. Always leave a minimum of 600mm clearance between the MEWP and other solid objects. Where this is not possible, the area MUST be cordoned off.

Handling materials

If MEWPs are to be used to install materials, it is essential to know the weight and dimensions of those materials and to properly consider any manual handling and load distribution issues.

Pre-use checks and machine faults

The trained operator is responsible for carrying out a basic daily/pre-use function check. In addition, there will be basic maintenance required by the manufacturer. Records of these checks should be kept.

The operator should also be fully aware of the procedure to follow should they identify a fault with the MEWP, e.g. isolate the controls, tag the machine and report the defect to your site supervisor.

MEWPs, and any material handling devices must be thoroughly examined at least every six months by a competent person, or at an increased frequency in accordance with an examination scheme drawn up by such a competent person. You should ask to see and retain the report of the thorough examination for the equipment you are going to allow to be used on your site.

Familiarisation

It is the supervisor's responsibility to ensure that all operators are trained and given adequate time to undertake familiarisation on the use of the machine with a competent person. Familiarisation should follow on from basic training and should cover:

- ✓ manufacturer's instructions and warning;
- ✓ features of the specific model of MEWP;
- ✓ the control functions particular to the specific model of MEWP;
- ✓ the function of each safety device;
- ✓ the emergency lowering procedures.



Personal protective equipment

Operatives should wear the following, where appropriate, following the risk assessment:

- a hard hat (with or without a chin strap);
- suitable high visibility clothing;
- suitable cold/wet weather clothing; and
- A full body harness with a restraint lanyard to prevent a fall from the platform.

Adverse weather

1. Think about wet, cold and windy weather.
2. Is the MEWP designed only for indoor use or can it be used outdoors?
3. What is the manufacturer's maximum wind speed in which the MEWP can operate safely?
4. How will the wind speed be checked (usually with an anemometer) and by whom?
5. Is the MEWP being operated between buildings where increased wind speed and/or turbulence can be a particular problem?
6. What about the potential for wind chill, which can affect the operator's dexterity and concentration?
7. If using a MEWP rated as 'indoor only' think about wind exposure, e.g. in a partially clad building or where large doors are open at both ends of a fully clad building.

Hazards

- Operatives falling from height due to unsafe work practices.
- Overturning of the machine due to poor operating technique or unsatisfactory ground conditions.
- Collision with other vehicles.
- Tools and materials falling from height.
- Contact with high level, live cables and other obstructions such as ceiling hangers.
- Exhaust fumes, if used in a confined areas.
- High wind speeds and other adverse weather conditions.

Precautions

- All operators of MEWPS must be trained (IPAF or CSCS) in their use and must be 'familiar' with the machine which they are using.
- Operators should only operate the types of MEWP for which they have been trained.
- Always check that the machine is stable before use.
- Always ensure that you and a co-worker on the ground are familiar with how to lower the machine in an emergency.
- Use outriggers or stabilisers where necessary.
- Generally, for all MEWPs except scissor lifts, users should use a restraint lanyard clipped to the correct anchorage point on the machine.
- For scissors lifts, the need to use a safety harness/lanyard will depend upon the findings of the risk assessment.
- Never clip on to the adjacent structure.
- Ensure that the ground conditions are suitable for the type of machine in use; voids, drain covers etc. that could collapse.
- Do not load the machine beyond its safe working load.
- If your work involves removing equipment or materials from a structure, don't forget to allow for the extra loading.
- When manoeuvring in a confined area or where members of the public are at risk, always use a signaller.
- Be prepared to stop work and return to ground level if the wind speed or weather conditions deteriorate to an unacceptable level.
- Never climb out of the platform

