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GOOD PRACTICE NOTE MEWP CHAMBER

IWH Information Circular 2 – Balfour Beatty safety alert (Courtesy of Vertikal.net)

We have finally received a copy of the Balfour Beatty Safety Alert, issued in the UK that lays down new rules regarding scissor lift control boxes working on its sites. The Alert was prompted by an incident in which a man working for one of its subcontractors caught the sleeve or other loose part of his coat on the live joystick of a scissor lift, causing the unit to lurch forward under the ladder rack he was working on. The man suffered a fractured rib, but the incident could easily have caused a more serious injury or in the worst case a fatality.

Balfour Beatty
Engineering Services

04 2012
Draai van 1188
T14812

ZERO HARM
BY 2012

Safety ALERT

TOTAL SERVICE

MAJOR MEWP INCIDENT

A Balfour Beatty Engineering Services (BBES) subcontractor sustained a broken rib after his clothing became entangled in the unshrouded controls of a MEWP.

WHAT HAPPENED?

During the task of locking ladder rack together the operative became entangled (by his clothing) around the unshrouded controls of a scissor lift. The machine went into drive and dragged him under the ladder rack face up so that his body was bent backwards at a 90° angle.

The injured party's colleagues acted swiftly and put into practice their emergency arrangements to prevent further and more serious injury.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO?

Site management teams

- Senior BBES managers on site MUST immediately inspect all MEWPs and quarantine and replace any that are non-compliant.
- This also applies to direct subcontractors.
- MEWP acceptance sheets must be completed for all BBES and supply chain machines on site.

Supervisors

- Supervisors must ensure emergency rescue plans are in place and tested.
- Supervisors must brief ALL operatives on the use of emergency controls.

Engineers/ Operatives

- Inspect all MEWPs prior to use and report any faults.
- Ensure that loose clothing cannot interfere with controls and apply caution when using tool belts.

MEWPs are frequently used on our sites and we must ensure that we are all aware of the risks and controls needed to manage this kit - further details can be found on the BBES Work at Height Product Selector.

This incident has highlighted the importance of ensuring that risk control measures as identified in the risk assessment are reviewed and that emergency arrangements are tried and tested.

If you have any questions, please contact your site/ regional safety advisor.

Alan Shank
Health, Safety and Environment Director

ELIMINATE | MINIMISE | MITIGATE

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The Safety Alert

Balfour Beatty issued the Alert shortly afterwards, effectively banning machines whose joysticks are not completely shrouded from its sites. We understand that the company investigation found a one machine with a joystick that was completely surrounded, and as a result have made this design its example of a 'compliant' machine.

The first most suppliers found out about it was when the machines they were delivering to site were refused and the alert given as the reason. The interpretation of what was and what was not acceptable also seems to vary widely from site to site. The problem is that the number of scissor lifts with the type of control box shown as compliant, are in the minority. Even those with some sort of protection around the front of the joystick would not necessarily prevent loose clothing from catching on it.

All controls have some form of dead-man in addition to any surrounding protection, with many it is a trigger, while others employ a button or a time delayed 'enable' button. Fact is that joysticks are rarely live for longer than a few seconds after they are used. Either that was the case here, or the clothing managed to catch and engage the trigger as well as pull on the joystick? One very good point of the alert is that it flags up the issue to other site managers, warning about the risk of loose clothing and the importance of inspecting machines before use. However it is also encouraging rental companies to start modifying their machines to satisfy site interpretations of what is 'compliant' and what it not, thus negating the CE certification and possibly creating a new hazard.

Vertikal Comment

While we applaud the intentions behind this bulletin and the drive to improve safety, it would seem that the first two things spring to mind from this bulletin so far are:

- 1) - that major contractors are tending to quickly mandate overly prescriptive solutions following examples of classic operator error. And;*
- 2) - that in spite of all that has been said contractors are still not openly sharing information with the industry as a whole.*

We formally requested a copy of this Alert two weeks ago and still do not have an official copy or confirmation of what happened from the contractor. The fact is that this incident was caused by loose clothing not only catching on the controller, but also being then pulled, rather than unhitched. Wearing such loose clothing is not dissimilar, in principle, to driving a car while wearing clogs, eventually it will lead to an accident, when it does the first reaction shouldn't be to demand a change of design to the car's clutch or the brake pedal.

The site inspectors are making decisions that are in danger of overruling detailed and thoughtful CE related risk assessments and analysis, as they focus on a specific issue, the solution to which might well be the creation of an additional hazard.

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Certainly machines should be checked that they are in working order and that any protective bars or covers not missing, but this is in danger of going much further. In our opinion the correct thing to have done in this situation would be to have warned all staff of the incident and its cause and warned them to be alert for such an eventuality- as the company did, but then to have raised the on-going technical concern with the relevant manufacturer, or the industry as a whole through an organisation such as IPAF... it could be that the best solution to this is not to add shrouds which can create other issues, but to use an improved dead-man function such as a spring loaded button or heat/touch sensitive joystick?

We would have liked to have known a lot more detail about what actually happened, as it is hard to image that this was just a simple catch of the sleeve on a joystick which is easily and quickly rectified. While modern aerial lifts are by far and away the safest equipment on site, there are always lessons to be learnt that can help fine tune or improve them still further. This is not best served by prescriptive solutions created on a local level. That approach, which used the case in Europe, leads to a different machine for every area and eventually stifles progress and becomes a brake on new ideas and improvements.

Comment:

We see this in South Africa as well on a regular basis, where a customer on site may react to a situation by addressing sometimes completely inappropriate remedies without taking cognisance of the fact that these machines were designed to international standards with very specific criteria and well-thought through reasons.

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