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SAFETY TIPS FOR THE USE OF MOBILE ELEVATING WORK PLATFORMS (MEWPs) IN THE TREE CARE INDUSTRY



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SAFETY AND TRAINING

MEWPs, also known as aerial work platforms (AWPs), are one of the safest means to provide temporary access to work at height, provided a risk assessment is completed prior to use, the equipment is operated by qualified, trained and familiarised personnel, the equipment is inspected and maintained, and safe use procedures are followed, including having a rescue plan. Knowing how to make the aerial lift move alone is not adequate to maintain your safety.

To ensure safe operation and avoid incidents or machine damage, it is essential that all operators (employed and self-employed) undergo formal recognised operator training, which includes both theory and practical training and evaluation by a qualified person. Go to www.ipaf.org for more training information.



CASE STUDIES

Accident statistics show approximately one in five of all MEWP-related fatalities involve tree care workers. Below are examples of fatal incident reports:

A routine tree-trimming job turned fatal when a 61-year-old contractor fell to his death while undertaking tree work. The deceased was hired by a local resident to trim trees. He was between two trees up in the air and the boom he was in made contact with a branch and got stuck. An observer told officials the branch then sprang loose, causing the boom to shake side-to-side, throwing the operator from the platform. He fell some 13 to 15 metres (45 to 50 feet) to the ground below.

NOTE: Avoid contacting branches as this could cause snagging of the platform and result in sudden and unintended movement and machine damage. Always wear required personal fall protection.

A MEWP operator died from electrocution when his platform came into contact with a 7,200-volt overhead cable. The owner of a tree trimming service was manoeuvring his boom lift when he touched a high-voltage power line.

NOTE: Perform a risk assessment prior to work and implement control measures to avoid hazards such as overhead power lines.

The owner of a tree maintenance company died while working in a MEWP. Witnesses say the victim was working more than 18 metres (60 feet) in the air when a tree branch fell onto his platform, somehow trapping and choking him.

NOTE: Ensure workers and platform are correctly positioned prior to work commencing, to avoid being hit by falling objects and debris.

HOW TO DO IT RIGHT

IMPORTANT - Follow all applicable safety training guidance and best practices as well as manufacturer instructions for safe operation.

REMEMBER - Before beginning work, the trained operator must:

- > Check the machine is not damaged, is safe to use and functioning correctly.
- > Take care when travelling to the work area – avoid sloping ground.
- > Make sure the ground can support the MEWP at all times.
- > Always use suitable spreader plates under outriggers.
- > Organise and manage segregated drop zones clear of MEWP base and structure.
- > Take necessary precautions to protect the operator from the chainsaw.

REMEMBER - While doing the work, the trained operator must:

- > Do regular checks to make sure the MEWP is not sinking into the ground.
- > Always wear an appropriate harness and ensure the lanyard is tied off to the designated anchor point inside the platform. See IPAF technical guidance H1.
- > Avoid making contact with or snagging branches – take care and use continual observation when raising and lowering the boom.
- > Identify potential hazards such as overhead power lines and take necessary precautions to eliminate the risk of electrocution.
- > Always be observant and operate the MEWP controls smoothly and with care.
- > Never use the MEWP as a crane or secure supporting ropes to any part of the MEWP.

- > Never take fuel up in the platform – always refuel the chainsaw on the ground.
- > Never exceed rated capacities for total load, maximum number of persons or wind speed.

REMEMBER - After finishing the work, the trained operator must:

- > Clear the MEWP of sawdust and debris.
- > Check the machine for any damage – report any damage to the platform immediately.
- > Leave the machine in a safe and secure place with all controls isolated – and keys removed.
- > Report any damage to the owner – do not allow use of MEWP once damaged.





- 1** Always use suitable spreader plates under outriggers.
- Take precautions to protect the operator from the chainsaw – the use of a manufacturer-approved platform divider is mandatory in some countries.

- 2** Always cut trees to ensure branches fall away from and clear of the platform.

- 3** Always ensure the lanyard is tied off to the designated anchor point inside the platform.

NOTE: Many IPAF members offer formal recognised operator training, which leads to the issue of a PAL Card (Powered Access Licence) to prove that the holder has successfully completed the training. The PAL Card proves that the holder has been trained in the safe use of the MEWP category shown. Additional guidance on working in the tree care sector may be necessary. A list of IPAF accredited training centres can be found at www.ipaf.org

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