

Safe use of Mobile Elevated Working Platforms (MEWPs)



There are various types of Mobile Elevated Working Platforms, MEWPs. Amongst these one can find cherry pickers, scissor lifts, spider lifters, lifting platforms and articulated boom lifters. MEWPs are used for lifting materials and, or personnel to a height and are widely used throughout industry. In the field of occupational health and safety, the use of such equipment by workers at work is covered by the Work Equipment (Minimum Safety and Health Requirements) Regulations, 2016, S.L. 424.35 (L.N. 293/2016). In terms of Schedule III of the said regulations, MEWPs are considered as lifting machines.

The regulations specify that all parts and gear of the lifting machine must be thoroughly examined by a competent person¹ at least once in every period of twelve months. In the case where lifting machine or its attachment is used to lift persons, it must be examined at least once in every period of six months. A copy of the examination report must accompany the lifting machine at the workplace where it is being used and it must be kept available for inspection.

MEWPs are designed to provide a safe means of performing work at height, only if they are used for their intended purpose and according to the manufacturer's instructions. The main types of MEWPs are vehicle mounted, trailer mounted or self-propelled - scaffolding systems and rope access (*pont*) are not included. They can either travel vertically (e.g. scissor lift) or incorporate a boom and work platform (e.g. cherry picker with a basket) which gives access to various positions within the operating radius and height of the particular equipment. There are various models available which can be used indoors or outdoors.



Vehicle mounted cherry picker



Trailer mounted (towed) MEWP

¹ A competent person means a person possessing adequate qualifications, suitable training and sufficient knowledge, experience and skill for the safe performance of the specific task or work required



Self-propelled MEWP



Scissor lift (indoor)



Scissor lift

Considering the large variety of lifting machines and their operating modes, one will find a number of different safety features that are built into the equipment to ensure its safe use. The use of MEWPs can pose various hazards, which could lead to injuries. These include:

- Falling – operator² falls from the work platform.
- Entrapment – operator gets caught between the work platform and another structure.
- Collision – any part of the MEWP hits another structure or power lines or is itself hit by a vehicle or other equipment.
- Falling objects – material or tools may fall from the work platform and cause damage or injure third parties.
- Overturning – the operator is thrown out of the work platform.
- Overloading – this could lead to failure of parts of the MEWP injuring the operator.

² The operator is the employee or self-employed person who controls the movement of the MEWP

Before using a MEWP

In order to determine whether to use a MEWP or the type of equipment that should be used for a particular work activity, a suitable, sufficient and systematic risk assessment must be carried out by a competent person. This must take into consideration, amongst other things, the work to be undertaken, the manufacturer's instructions, access to the site, ground conditions, any constraints of the site like power lines and positioning of the MEWP. The risk assessment must also determine if and how a safety harness is required to be used by the operator of the MEWP. The control measures must then be applied to minimise the risks and mitigate the consequences of an accident.

The risk assessment must cover all work activities and identify associated hazards and risks. This will enable the employer³ to select the most suitable equipment for the job and the control measures to be adopted. With this information, a plan can be developed in cooperation with the workers involved. The risk assessment has to establish whether a harness must be used and if so, identify a suitable anchor point. The use of a harness may be required to prevent the operator from overreaching from the work platform. It is also important that the plan identifies a banksman who is trained to lower the work platform should the operator become incapacitated or to organise rescue in case of equipment malfunction.

Important considerations when using a MEWP:

- verify weather conditions are within the operational parameters of the equipment;
- evaluate site restrictions, access, erection and operation;
- ensure ground conditions can safely support the weight of the MEWP and load;
- if there is sloping ground ensure that the incline is within the limits of the MEWP;
- make traffic arrangements, where applicable;
- provide safe pedestrian access, where applicable;
- ensure that the work platform has adequate guard rails, flooring and toe-boards;
- employ competent operators;
- provide adequate personal protective equipment;
- deploy outriggers and use spreader plates if necessary, where applicable;
- do not exceed the safe working load;
- ensure good communication between operator and banksman;
- do not travel with the platform raised unless the MEWP is designed to do so;
- ensure means of recovery in the event of malfunction;
- keep equipment in a good state of repair;
- carry out pre-use checks;
- carry out regular maintenance;
- always have a valid examination report of equipment;
- always follow manufacturer's instructions;

³ employer is the person whose employee operates the MEWP or the self-employed person operating the MEWP.



Documentation required to be in possession of the employer:

- A copy of the last examination report of the MEWP has to be available on site for inspection.
- Proof of training of the operator.
- Risk assessment (risks from MEWP operations, path of travel, ground stability, protection of workers and third parties, fall protection, banksman, etc.).
- Records of maintenance and repairs.

Important: Records of inspection reports must be kept for a period of two years;

Obligations of duty holders:

The **employer** must ensure that the operator has received adequate training, is fully competent to carry out his duties and is supervised to ensure the safe use of the MEWP. The use of such work equipment must be restricted to those persons given the task of using it, since it is likely to involve a specific risk. Hence the employer must ensure that employees are given written instructions on how to operate the MEWP, together with the conditions of use.

The employer must ensure that regular maintenance, repairs, renewals or alterations on the MEWP are carried out by competent persons in order to provide employees with work equipment which is safe for use. It is recommended that printed or electronic records of such works are kept and made available when requested by a competent authority.

Besides the employer's responsibilities, the **employee** has the duty to cooperate with the employer and to safeguard one's own health and safety and that of other persons. The employee must take all necessary precautions to ensure that operations do not pose unwarranted risks to workers or other persons who may be affected by the work activity. It is imperative that the safe working load is not exceeded and the MEWP is used within its operating parameters according to the manufacturer's instructions. The employee is required to report any hazards, equipment faults, incidents or accidents to his employer.

Furniture lifters (ladder hoist or ladder lift)

The equipment shown in the figures below is referred to by different names. It is basically an open platform moving on inclined tracks and is used to lift furniture or other materials to a height to be carried into the building. This type of equipment is normally either vehicle mounted or towed.



Although furniture lifters may not be considered as MEWPs because they are not intended to transport personnel, most of the above is applicable to them. It is important that the equipment is erected and operated by trained personnel according to the manufacturer's instructions. All precautions must be taken by employers and employees to ensure their own safety and that of others. This type of equipment, with an open platform, must not be used to transport personnel.



Vehicle mounted furniture lifter



Towed lifter

When MEWPs are used in construction sites, the specific requirements of the Work Place (Minimum Health and Safety Requirements for Work at Construction Sites) Regulations, S.L.424.36 (L.N. 88/2018) also apply. The **project supervisor**⁴ must ensure that the health and safety plan contains the plan for performing the work at height and that this is communicated and understood by all contractors concerned. The contractor/s must take into account directions from the project supervisor.

The **Client**⁵ must take account of any report given in writing by the project supervisor and must also take all reasonable measures to ensure that duty holders abide by their obligations within the limits of their respective responsibilities for the adequate safeguard of occupational health and safety.

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Every effort has been made to ensure that the information in this document is correct and provided in good faith according to current best practice. The information provided in this document does not, and is not intended to constitute legal advice. It is also strongly recommended that one considers all relevant regulations related to this subject.

⁴ The Project Supervisor is the natural or legal person appointed by the Client in terms of regulation 3 of the Work Place (Minimum Health and Safety Requirements for Work at Construction Sites), S.L.424.36. The project supervisor is responsible for the health and safety supervision of the project.

⁵ The Client is the natural or legal person for whom a project is carried out, i.e. the owner of the site.

References

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