Promoting the safe and effective use of powered access worldwide

CONSEQUENCE OF OVERLOADING THE PLATFORM
TOOLBOX TALK

WHAT IS PLATFORM OVERLOADING?

There is a requirement for all lifting equipment, including Mobile Elevating Work Platforms (MEWPs), to specify maximum capacity limits. For MEWPs, this is the safe working load (SWL) which is expressed in kilograms or pounds and includes the maximum number of people allowed in the platform. An overload is the intentional, or accidental, exceeding of these limits.

WHAT IS THE RISK OF OVERLOADING?

All MEWPs are designed and tested to take the specified capacity limits while maintaining appropriate safety factors.

If a MEWP occupant places more load on to the platform and tries to raise it or puts more than the rated load on the platform while at height, there is a risk that the structure will be put under forces it was not designed or tested for. Structural failure in this condition could be sudden and unpredictable and could result in collapse or overturn.

If an operator allows more people on to the platform than the specified limit recommended by the manufacturer, then the dynamic loads (including wind forces for example) could exceed those designed and tested for, resulting in instability and the risk of overturning.

Most MEWPs in the marketplace today have a safety system that monitors overload status and protects the operator from exceeding specified capacity limits, however machines built to previous standards may not have this system installed.

If an elevated MEWP fitted with a load-sensing system is in an overloaded state, platform functions can sometimes be limited or prevented from operating. This can potentially leave platform occupants stranded at height until the material is removed.

WHO NEEDS TO KNOW?

This toolbox talk applies to all individuals involved when directing a MEWP on site:

- The User
- Site manager
- Operator
- Nominated ground rescue person

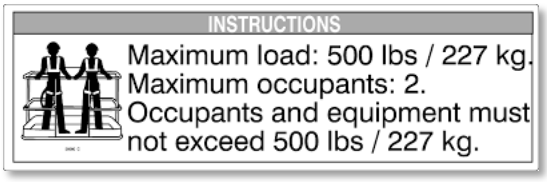
CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO THE RISK OF OVERLOAD

- Not planning the job effectively.
- Not knowing the safe working load for the MEWP being used.
- Not understanding or underestimating the weight of materials and people that may be loaded on to the platform.
- Not paying attention to or effectively monitoring loads being placed on to the platform.

WHAT CAN YOU DO AS AN OPERATOR?

- Ensure the correct MEWP has been selected for the task to be carried out and that it can safely lift the intended loads.
- Pay attention to the load being placed on the platform and make sure it is evenly distributed. If you are unsure of the weight of the load or suspect that the platform is overloaded, you must cease work until it has been verified that the total platform load is within the safe working load.
- Do not use the machine if you can't identify the safe working load, this can be found on the manufacturers data plate, operator's manual and SWL decals provided.
- Understand the task and know the weight of the loads that are to be placed on the platform.
- Ensure that the site has an effective rescue plan in place, and that is practiced, rehearsed, and understood.

Operators are the first and last line of defence – never take chances, always work safely.



SWL decal example

USEFUL REFERENCES

- IPAF Operators Safety Guide (available on the ePAL app www.ipaf.org/ePAL)
- Andy Access poster (available at www.ipaf.org/andyaccess)