

Risk Manager

Answers, resources and information to help assess and reduce risk

Aerial Lift Safety By Mark Nease

Each spring, as students anticipate the last day of school for the summer break, maintenance staff anticipates summer maintenance projects. Some of these projects involve working at heights, which can necessitate the use of an aerial lift.

Aerial lifts, vehicle-mounted devices designed to transport and raise personnel to overhead work areas, may have replaced ladders and scaffolds over the years, but they still have elements of danger. Here are some hazards of aerial lifts:

- Falls from elevated levels
- Falling objects
- Tip-overs
- Electrical shocks
- Striking objects overhead
- Contacting persons/objects

Supervisors should train each operator on how to safely use each specific aerial lift. Training should consist of the following:

- Qualifications necessary to operate the equipment.
- The specific use requirements of the equipment, such as “Inside buildings only” or “For building maintenance only.”
- Types of hazards associated with aerial lifts and how to avoid those hazards.
- Instructions for correct operation, such as maintaining maximum load capacity and staying within vertical and horizontal reach limits.

- Hands-on demonstration of operation – both transporting to the work zone and vertical use within the work zone.
- How to inspect the aerial lift prior to use. (Staff should devise a checklist of items to inspect, as specified in the operators manual and then make that checklist available to operators.)
- Requirements specified by the manufacturer through the operators manual. These could include preventive maintenance guidelines and fall protection requirements for safe operation.
- Proper shutdown procedures. (i.e., return aerial lift to designated storage location and connect to battery charger.)
- How to designate work zones to keep pedestrians safe from possible falling objects. This can be achieved through the use of cones, signage or caution tape.

Work Zones

Protocols to consider during use of aerial lifts in work zones include the following:

- Identify and avoid use on unstable surfaces, debris or floor obstructions.
- Avoid use where there are inadequate ceiling heights.
- Identify and protect operators from overhead hazards, including obstructions and electrical lines.
- Avoid use in electrical storms, high winds or other severe weather protocols.

Fall Protection

Operators of aerial lifts should understand and maintain fall protection guidelines, including the following:

- Operate equipment only when access gates/bars are securely closed.
- Occupy the bucket of the aerial lift with feet on floor and never standing on objects within the bucket to gain extra reach.
- Stay within the perimeter of the aerial lift bucket and never climb or lean over railing.
- Use a full-body fall protection harness with lanyard of adequate length attached to a secure section of aerial lift bucket.

Aerial lifts can be convenient tools for overhead work, however, their operators are not immune to danger. Supervisors must ensure that each operator is thoroughly trained on each equipment-specific aerial lift so that all dangers can be minimized through the use of work-practice protocols and personal protective equipment (PPE) use.

For additional information or training on best practices and safety management within your school entity, please contact Director of Risk Management Sharon Orr at (866) 401-6600, ext. 7152 or sorr@cmregent.com.