

Dear Sir,

I am responding to Leigh Sparrow's editorial regarding hire rates.

Leigh is quite right in that nothing changes. I have worked in the industry for 40 years going through at least three recessions in that time. Every time the going got tough everybody was to blame. Manufacturers for selling machines cheaply, the opposition for cutting rates but it was never them that started it.

For most of my time the problem lay in the total inability to understand marketing or to sell effectively. The industry has a history of paying high salaries and issuing cars and expenses to people who frankly couldn't sell ice cream in the desert. Differentiation was understood to be in the back axle of a vehicle and a price list only existed in the cafe. It is no wonder that the hire industry became a commodity, with rates rising and falling based upon demand.

In recent years there has been a significant shift, at least amongst the 'Big boys' and quoted companies in particular. They at least have been pro-active in developing marketing strategies and exploiting web based and information technology but whether they charge enough for the service is another matter.

I am now a business consultant working for a number of builders and frequently come across so called sales people and frankly I wouldn't pay them in washers. Too often it is claimed that the hire industry is extremely competitive. That is often used as an excuse but it is a fact but so too is every other market and the companies that survive or thrive are those that offer value for money and the best service as well as standing by their principles.

Yours Sincerely,

DJ

(On reflection this correspondent thought it best to withhold his name as, he says, he has caused a fuss in the past with his forthright views. What we can say is that he has spent most of his career in the UK crane and access rental business)

Dear Leigh,

I love the way the press has taken to calling crane accidents "mishaps" They even did this the other day when someone was killed. I wish I could find a way to reach out to reporters and try to educate them, or at least offer them advice.

Reader from Texas

He was referring to a trend amongst news papers and their on line news services - not any of our publications! ED

Dear Leigh,

I felt the attached really ought to receive publicity in your magazine as it is such an appalling example of complete disregard for health and safety from a country that prides itself on doing everything correctly!

This publication, as you will see, comes from "Switzerland Tourism", who obviously have an outlet in London and I would have thought you could have a lot of fun ridiculing the pompous Swiss over this hideous example of the mis-use of ladders.

Hope you find room to print it - I have sent a copy to Tim Whiteman as I feel that he is even better placed than you to 'tilt at windmills'.

Best wishes.

Paul
(Adorian)



Re Overhead Lines

Subject Work Access set to change

I read with interest the article with regards to the HSE and main companies accessing masts and pylons by mechanical means and not by personnel climbing methods.

Let us look at machines in fields in the winter months, to contend with muck, mud, mire, men, machines, mess and much money and mayhem not to mention mad farmers.

Muddy marvellous - could lead to murder when machines turn over in the mud.

Regards,
ID Avey
Newark
Nottinghamshire

*Mr Avey has a point, although one assumes that the men and equipment that are going to be used to climb the poles and pylons do not make their way to the location on foot or by donkey? The point that the HSE makes and that we would in general support is that there are a wide variety of lifts on the market now that cause no greater stress to the ground than the off-road vehicles that climbing crews use and if set up correctly will not result in tipping. We would be interested though in hearing from more people in the industry on the practicalities or not of substituting climbing with lifts.
Ed*

Don McColgan of Mantis Cranes in Ireland has alerted us to a major scam being worked revolving around the purchase of used Cranes. The scam could of course just as easily apply to aerial lifts and telehandlers. In this case the scam was worked with a great deal of finesse all intended to create confidence. Read and be aware.

Dear Mark,

Some time ago we received an email enquiring about a tower crane for sale on our website, requesting price, technical specification etc. Naturally we made a good offer and waited until he had time to digest it. A few days later he came back to us asking what our best price was and we said: "you have it".

A few days later he then emailed us back asking: "Will you negotiate on the price you have asked me for? If so its a deal." So I emailed him my very best price for the crane taking into consideration what was then a worsening market by the week. We agreed a final price and he then asked that we send him our bank account details so that he could arrange to transfer the money into our bank account, which we naturally did. I asked him if he wanted a proforma invoice or anything other form of formal paperwork from us and he said it was not necessary at this stage.

We then heard nothing from him for approximately two months and no money ever appeared in our account thus we just assumed that the enquiry had gone away. Then out of the blue one day we received an email saying: "I was called away on urgent business and did not get finishing the deal with you and i am just back a few days thus I am wondering if the crane is still available for sale? As it was I replied "Yes".

The purchase was therefore agreed and he said that the funds would be transferred. A few days later he then emailed to say that his accountant had over paid us by around €150,000 thus could we arrange to send him back the over-payment.

We checked our bank account and sure enough, the money was there, almost €300,000 of it. We printed off a statement from our bank account as we have on-line banking. At this stage we asked the bank to check-out the payment as we were naturally slightly suspicious of it, and within 24 hours they came back confirming that indeed it may well be a fraudulent payment.

It then transpired that the payment was made via an Irish Health Service Executive cheque which had been paid into our bank account however after 5-10 days it would have been discovered that the payment was not real, in the meantime the scammers were hoping that we would have sent him 'back' the overpaid amount. In the meantime when the bank finally discovered that an error had been made in crediting our account with a dodgy cheque there would have been a significant battle with a good chance that we would have been the losers!

Its a rare banking system where we even have a copy of the online bank statement which we captured while the funds were showing as present in our account !

Who knows he may well have only been a few miles down the road from me in an internet cafe, he was saying the crane was for Dubai but I reckon he just picked that destination as it has been the crane city over for the past few years.

Thankfully we had good experiences of export sales over the past few years as well, with units gone to Malta, New York and Nigeria most recently in the last few weeks. You just have to be vigilant when dealing on a International Market in order to select the serious enquiries from the time wasters, something that can often be difficult, and with the market slow down now in the UK & Ireland no one wants to miss the opportunity of a export sale.

Regards

Don McColgan

Mantis Cranes Ireland Ltd. Killygordon, Co. Donegal Ireland www.mantiscranes.ie

Dear Leigh,

Ladder Inspection is Imperative

With an estimated 2 million ladders in daily use, the message from the Ladder Association remains unequivocal: if it's right to use a ladder, use the right ladder and get trained to use it properly. As you know, the Association emphasizes five key points when using ladders and stepladders:

- Select the right equipment based on risk assessment;
- Make sure the work is properly planned and organised;
- Use the right type and classification of ladder;
- Set up the ladder correctly and use it safely;
- Ensure it's properly maintained and in good condition.

Inspection is such a crucial component of ladder safety, it has been chosen as a key theme for 2009 and will feature strongly in the Association's presentations in the Working at Height Seminar Theatre at the Safety & Health Expo, 12-14 May 2009 at the NEC. Maintaining ladders in good working order requires pre-use checks by the user, detailed inspections and maintenance.

Pre-Use Checks

The aim of a pre-use check is to quickly establish whether a ladder is safe to use there and then. The user must carry out a pre-use check prior to setting up the ladder (this may only need to be done once a day for frequently used ladders). It is a visual and functional check intended to enable the user to identify obvious defects likely to prevent its safe and proper use. This might include, for example, stiles that are warped, cracked, bent, rotten or of different lengths. Or rungs that are missing, worn, loose or damaged.

Other points to look for include paint or dirt on the ladder which may hide defects, rivets or screws that are missing, and welds that are cracked or corroded.

Detailed Inspections

Detailed inspections of work equipment, as required by the regulations, are more in-depth than pre-use checks and need to be carried out by competent persons. The aim is to establish whether the ladder is safe for continued use, or that maintenance and remedial work is necessary. In-depth visual and functional inspections need to be carried out at set intervals and formally recorded.

To be competent in undertaking an inspection, a person should know what types of defects or deterioration could be present; whether the defect or problem found is serious enough to prevent further use of the ladder (disposal or repair); or if increased, interim inspections are necessary.

Maintenance

Ladders must be maintained in accordance with the manufacturers' guidelines. The need to keep ladder anti-slip feet clean is of paramount importance so that the co-efficient of friction is maintained between the foot of the ladder and the ground. The ladder also needs to be kept clean so that defects are not hidden from view.

Wooden ladders should not be painted as this can hide defects. Wooden ladders, when coated, should be coated with a transparent finish - for example, varnish, shellac or a clear preservative.

Handling and Storage

Ladders should be stored in accordance with the manufacturers' instructions and advice, and handled with care to avoid damage to either the equipment or the person handling the equipment. When being transported, they need to be firmly secured and properly supported to prevent damage. These are just some of the key points:

- Ladders should be stored in covered, ventilated areas, protected from the weather and away from too much dampness, heat or cold;
- Ladders can fall if stored vertically, so take particular care and, if possible, secure the top;
- Never hang a ladder vertically from a rung;
- Don't store a ladder where a child might be tempted to climb it;
- Store ladders on one edge, in racks or hung from a stile with enough supports to prevent sagging;
- Wooden and steel ladders should be stored in the dry and off the ground to prevent rot and corrosion;
- For long-term storage, ladders should be protected from the elements.

All these points, and many more, are covered in the Ladder Association's recently launched ladder inspection scheme which will be featured at Access Live and in the Access Village as part of Safety and Health Expo. Your readers are invited to visit us in Birmingham or to click on www.ladderassociation.org.uk for more information.

Yours sincerely

Don Aers,
Chairman, Ladder Association &
Technical Manager, Youngman Group

Letters to the editor:

Please send letters to the editor: Cranes&Access: PO Box 6998, Brackley NN13 5WY, UK. We reserve the right to edit letters for length. We also point out that letters are the personal views of our readers and not necessarily the views of the Vertical Press Ltd or its staff.