

13 January 2011



Dear Leigh,

Cranes & Access: Low Level Access Feature

As a follow-up to your feature on low level access in the December/January 2011 issue of *Cranes & Access*, your readers might be interested to know that PASMA and HSE recently warned users of low level access products such as podium steps and folding room scaffolds to make sure that the equipment they have bought, or hired, meets at least the minimum standards of fall protection.

The warning follows increased concern about cheap, inferior products now flooding the UK market, especially in the construction sector, which offer limited protection to users by not having an adequate guardrail system fitted as standard.

Since 2004, industry estimates suggest that five times as many (50,000) of these non-mechanical low level access units have been sold in the British Isles alone, in comparison to the mechanical versions of which your article advises some 10,000 have been sold.

In theory these products provide a compact, lightweight and protected work platform that represents a safe method of working at height, especially at low heights of 2.5 metres and below.

Unfortunately, whenever there is high demand for a product there is inevitably an opportunity for companies to offer deficient equipment, which, in the absence of a minimum standard, can be marketed with impunity, thus exacerbating the already concerning accident statistics for low level work at height.

Against this background, PASMA's technical committee is in the final stages of setting a minimum standard for quality and performance, working with the British Standards Institution (BSI) to draft a publicly available specification (PAS). It has also developed an additional module in its widely recognised training scheme devoted solely to low level access, and produced a new DVD/CD 'Accidents can happen even at low level'.

Yours sincerely

PETER BENNETT

Managing Director

Prefabricated Access Suppliers' & Manufacturers' Association (PASMA)

Dear Sir

During my 10 years as a Director/Managing Director of a large independent crane training provider I spent a great deal of my time sitting on various standard setting committees with the aim of raising the safety bar across the lifting industry.

The cause of many accidents with lifting equipment can be attributed to complacency, carelessness, over familiarity or recklessness. Rigorous, well structured training goes some way to raising awareness of the kind of things which contribute to catastrophic failure, such as tampering with or over riding safety devices.

It was therefore with great sadness and disappointed that I was alerted to a video posted online of a crane trainer de-rigging his crane whilst he simultaneously filmed himself. The video then clearly shows that the foot operated dead man's switch had been disabled with the use of a spanner. This is not an old video of times long ago or a video from a tin pot training organisation. This is very recent and a 'reputable' provider.

If we, as an industry, cannot get the training element right then what chance do we have of improving the standards when those trainees go on to work on site? Over riding a safety device is reckless in the extreme, not to mention illegal.

Your readers need to be constantly aware that when tragic accidents happen the HSE will investigate the cause and if an operator is found to have tampered with safety devices then they face prosecution. For the sake of resting one foot this crane trainer put the safety of himself and others at risk as well as undermining the great work of those who do what they can to make sure construction and allied workers get home safely to their families after each shift.

Yours faithfully

Ian D Fisher

Managing Director

IS Training Ltd



Dear Leigh,

I wanted to draw your attention to a scaffold collapse incident that occurred at the Princess Noura University construction site in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, this week.

Our understanding is that as many as 30 Saudi Oger employees may have lost their lives in the incident, although the local press reports here have suggested that there were only three fatalities.

Although an investigation into the cause of the incident is still underway, it would appear that a crane collided with the top two levels of scaffold and caused the entire structure to fall.

For obvious reasons, we do not want to be associated directly with the publication of this information and the photograph attached, but we are keen to raise awareness of this incident to a broader audience in the hope that it might just play a small part in helping to bring a sharper focus on the need for improved Health & Safety on construction sites in the country.

With Best Regards,

Name and company withheld as requested.

The following are two letters sent by a reader in the UK to his member for Parliament concerning the habit of placing the current owners and management of a failing company into a 'Pre Pack administration. The company then walks away from its liabilities and yet maintains the same management and ownership as the failed company. We have removed the correspondents name as matter of courtesy. Ps the link was to a Vertikal.Net report on one such administration - we do not have copies of any responses.

Dear David,

I would ask you to read the attached link and ask yourself is this right?

The previous government changed the rules regarding receivership and administration, which in the view of many are iniquitous and grossly unfair, causing many small businesses not getting paid and the administrators earning fat fees. There is a challenge to change the law concerning this and I would like to see our new Government making this change. Look at the US Chapter 11 rule which goes a long way to protect the small business's and apply something similar here.

Yours

Dear David,

The issue is a national one where the law needs to be changed. It is far too easy for companies to file for administration walking away from their financial liabilities and begin again, leaving any number of small businesses to lose the money owed to them as a consequence. There is also an issue regarding the cavalier way administrators go about their business also. Parliament needs to change the law concerning this, thus giving those small companies some protection, as they too could become victims and go out of business themselves!

Yours

Hello Editor,

I have been a keen reader for some years but have not submitted anything for your pages. Attached is a photo I came across last year.

You might find some humour in it. The pick and carry crane? was spotted at Matarau, Northland, New Zealand. Really an enigma considering that the manufacturer was employed by an engineering company which owns a range of cranes and has them for hire.

Note the modern trailer base, the mixture of counterweights [cast & local rocks], the five part tackle with 21st century running rope and the anchor - the tie rail on the trailer.

Also the prime mover - a Japanese Quad bike. One wonders if the cost of an hours hire at 'mates rates' of a truck loader crane would have been more economical than the effort and risk.

There is the thrill of reinventing medieval machines though!

Best Regards,

Name withheld on request.

Auckland, Jan 2011





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