

Work Equipment: Management Briefing

'Work equipment' can cover almost any equipment used by a worker at work, including machines such as circular saws and drilling machines, hand tools such as screwdrivers and knives, lifting equipment like lifting slings, and other equipment such as ladders and water pressure cleaners. Office equipment is also included in the definition.

Safe operation of plant requires competence; a combination of training and experience. The unsafe use of plant can lead to injuries to the user and others.

Did you know?

- There were 17,381 specified (major) non-fatal injuries to employees reported in 2016/17
- Approximately 10% of fatal injuries at work are caused by contact with moving machinery
- In 2016/17 there were 52,735 injuries to employees, causing absence from work of over seven days.

Guidelines to employers

Ensure that the work equipment you provide meets the requirements of Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER) and is:

- Suitable for use, and for the purpose and conditions in which it is used
- Maintained in a safe condition
- Inspected regularly by a competent person and records are kept
- CE marked by the supplier.

Eliminate risks where possible or control them by:

- Taking appropriate 'hardware' measures, e.g. providing suitable guards, protection devices, markings and warning devices, system control devices (such as emergency stop buttons) and personal protective equipment
- Taking appropriate 'software' measures such as following safe systems of work (e.g. ensuring maintenance is only performed when equipment is shut down etc.), and providing adequate information, instruction and training.

Train, instruct and inform for each piece of equipment.

Where mobile work equipment is used for carrying people, check it is suitable for this purpose. Measures should be taken to reduce the risks (e.g. from rolling over).

Case Law

A maintenance engineer slipped and caught his hand in machinery whilst attempting to steady himself. He put his hand on the rack and pinion gearing of a machine and the pinion rolled over it. His right index finger had to be amputated. The company was fined £40,000 plus £13,000 costs for contravening PUWER relating to the dangerous parts of machinery, and Regulation 3(1)(a) of MHSW for not having adequate risk assessments in place.

Manufacturing company Hanson Packed Products Ltd was prosecuted after a 26 year old worker was fatally crushed when his arm was caught in a powered roller. There should have been fixed guards around the roller but they were missing. The company was fined £750,000 and ordered to pay costs of £29,511.

Legal duties

- Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER). PUWER requires that equipment provided for use at work is: suitable for the intended use, safe, maintained and inspected
- The Supply of Machinery (Safety) Regulations 2008
- Section 6 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (MHSW)
- Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998.

Recommendations for employers

Ensure:

- all work equipment is suitable for the task. Consider job, location, conditions of use, etc.
- clear instructions are available, preferably in writing
- work equipment is maintained in efficient working order and good repair by competent staff or contractors
- work equipment is stable and adequately lit
- equipment is able to be isolated from its power source
- effective liaison with other owners of equipment
- records of maintenance are kept
- mobile equipment is provided with roll-over protection, as required.

Provide:

- information, instruction and training to employees and managers on the safe use and maintenance of equipment and who is authorised to use it
- a planned preventative maintenance programme
- suitable guarding to prevent access to dangerous parts, or, to stop dangerous parts before a person can reach them
- relevant markings and warnings
- safe systems of work and isolation procedures particular for maintenance activities
- visible and identifiable control devices which are in a safe place and easily accessible
- a written agreement for the maintenance of hired equipment.

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