Brian Parker discusses how to safely exit a MEWP at height.

I can recount my first experience and training on a Mobile Elevating Work Platform (MEWP) some 20 years ago, with my instructor drumming into me that I must stay in the platform at all times – always go home to your loved ones he said!!

So whilst considering this latest HSEQ Bulletin I was naturally on the defensive and very much biased towards the opinion that we shouldn’t exit the platform at height. However I’m mindful that this is the year 2016 and times have changed. MEWPs are more technically advanced and safer these days, and IPAF guidance has recently been produced on this subject (IPAF TGN E20815) so I felt it to be an appropriate topic to cover.

As you know MEWPs are primarily designed to lift people and their tools and materials to a height where they can safely work at height. This is normally from the confines of the working platform as MEWPs are not designed to be used as a lift for transferring people from one level to another. There are times, however, when it would be safer to exit at height from a MEWP platform rather than to rely on more traditional means of access.

When we climb into and out of a MEWP the MEWP is normally in its stowed position. However, there are situations when you could safely exit a MEWP platform to access an external location but you may have discounted this due to company policy or procedures. But before you start allowing operators or employees to start climbing out of MEWP platforms you need to ensure that a thorough and specific risk assessment has been carried out for the task.

The risk assessment must demonstrate that the MEWP is the safest option to gain access to the intended working location and all other means of access have been explored and rejected.

Before using any MEWP, a site specific risk assessment should be undertaken to ensure that all associated hazards and risks have been considered. You then need to ensure that all relevant control measures have been implemented.

When considering and planning for an operative to exit the platform at height it is essential that the following points have been considered (please bear in mind that this list is not exhaustive):

- Fall prevention methods must be maintained at all times when exiting/entering the platform at height.
• An authorised competent operator must always remain in the raised MEWP platform at the controls when someone exits the platform.
• Remember that dynamic loads can and will be exerted on the platform when a person enters or leaves it. This can have very differing dynamics depending on the type of MEWP you are using.
• MEWPs with large stiff structures minimise the movement between work platform and landing area during exiting or entering the platform at height. The total movement should be proved at ground level, using an appropriate boom extension to replicate the work requirement. If movement is in excess of 300 mm the MEWP should not be used for this application.
• Action should be taken to prevent unexpected or inadvertent movement of the platform.
• Do not climb over the guardrails, use the designated MEWP entrance / exit points.
• Ensure that standby personnel are available on the ground to facilitate a rescue from the MEWP or associated structure.
• There should be supervision by a responsible person to ensure that the identified safe method is adhered to by all personnel involved.

When assessing what hazards are present consider the following:

a. Potential risk of someone falling whilst transferring from the work platform to the structure
b. Dropping of tools and materials
c. Sudden and unexpected movement of the MEWP or work platform
d. The area around the chassis of the MEWP should be free of vehicular traffic
e. Stability issues when additional loads are imposed on the MEWP for which it was not designed

To avoid overloading at height, factor in the following:

a) Only people who have exited the platform should be allowed back into the work platform
b) The position of the work platform should not be changed between personnel exiting and re-entering at height
c) Always consider on MEWPs fitted with load moment limiting systems that increasing the outreach could reduce the SWL below that at the landing point
d) Dynamic and impact loads from personal fall protection equipment
e) Damage to the MEWP or structure by an unintentional movement of the MEWP
f) Persons becoming stranded at height
g) Safe and correct use of extending decks and gates, use of double ‘twin’ lanyards, etc.
h) Care should be taken when exiting or entering the work platform at height. Fall protection measures should be maintained at all times. Wherever possible the work platform should be positioned so that the access gate faces away from the edge of the structure.

Main Points

• Before exiting a MEWP at height always ensure that a risk assessment has been carried out.
• Ensure all relevant control measures have been implemented.
• Do not climb over the guardrails to exit the MEWP, instead use the MEWP entrance / exit points.
• Ensure that standby personnel are available on the ground to facilitate a rescue from the MEWP or associated structure.
• Consider the risks of someone falling whilst transferring from the work platform to the structure, dropping tools and stability issues due to additional loads.
• Avoid overloading at height.
• Fall protection measures should be maintained at all times.
• Wherever possible the work platform should be positioned so that the access gate faces away from the edge of the structure.
• A vertical gap of at least 120 mm (5 inches) should be maintained at all times between the work platform and the adjacent structure.
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j) Maintenance/replacement of fall protection measures for persons whilst they are on the structure. For fall arrest this capacity requirement must conform to BS EN 795.

Landing areas
Unless it has been confirmed otherwise by a person competent to do so, roofs should always be assumed to be fragile. The persons in the work platform may access a non-fragile, flat roof with edge protection (guard-rails and toe-boards) and protection preventing access to any fragile areas, provided that any movements of the work platform do not create additional hazards.

If on the other hand, the landing area is, for example, a pitched roof, a suitable method should be devised and adopted to ensure that persons cannot fall whilst exiting the work platform. This is likely to entail using a fall arrest system such as a full body safety harness and a twin legged lanyard, with shock absorber, attached to a suitable anchor point on the structure before exiting the platform to ensure that the individual has fall protection maintained at all times.

NOTE: BS 8437 gives guidance on the selection and use of personal fall protection equipment.

Factors to consider when assessing the risks associated with, and acceptability of the landing area include:

a) The size of the target area
b) Whether it is sloping, slippery or uneven
c) Headroom / overhead structures
d) Weather conditions (especially high winds and wet or freezing conditions)
e) The operational requirements of the task to be carried out
f) Possible interference with communications.

Remember exiting the platform isn’t an everyday occurrence and there are strict rules covering exiting the platform at height. Further guidance on exiting the MEWP at height can be found in BS8460:2005 or contact IPAF.

www.ipaf.org

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