



## Safety Practices for Operating Aerial Lifts

Of all the people dying due to errors in using aerial lifts, one in four is an electrician.

Falling off a lift is often a fatal error. But it's not the only way in which electricians die when making mistakes in how they use a lift. Electrocutions also happen. For example, raising the platform without watching where it's going can mean driving your shoulder or head into an energized, exposed conductor, such as an open bus connection.

### Some tips:

- Visualize the entire operation. Stand where the lift will be stationed, and look at where the platform will end up. What is in the way between those two points? What hazards are within 6 ft of the platform bottom? If a crew member is taller than 6 ft, adjust accordingly
- Before going up, check your fall protection PPE and the attachment points on the lift itself.
- Always inspect the hose connections, battery terminals, and other failure points before using the lift.
- Ensure the lift is properly situated on a level surface and in balance rather than tilting.
- If the lift is equipped with outriggers, ensure those are properly deployed. If the lift is not equipped with outriggers, be aware that it is going to be more prone to tipping.
- Some lifts are advertised as being drivable at height, and they have a great deal of extra weight to move the center of gravity so far down that tipping is almost impossible on level ground. Be very careful in taking liberty with this drivability feature. For example, move the lift slowly and only short distances along a path that has already been deemed safe (no pits, bumps, grades, etc.). Where practical, lower the platform even when you don't "have to" with this sort of lift.
- Never stand on the lower guardrail; this puts you at risk of falling off because your center of gravity is above the upper guardrail, and it increases the risk the lift will topple.
- Never use a ladder on a lift. It has an effect similar to standing on the guardrail.
- Don't toss things down to the ground crew. Lower things by rope.

Ground crews also face hazards. As a ground crew member, you might think



that you'll have plenty of time to move out of the way if the lift topples over. But the reality is that by the time you perceive that's what is happening, it's probably too late for you to get out of the way. The solutions here are:

- Don't be there. If you don't have to stand within a circle whose radius is equal to the height of the lift (with the lift at the center), don't.
- Stay outside that circle as much as possible. If you have to go inside it to do a task, do the task, and then move outside that circle.
- If you must be within that circle, stand to the "long end" of the lift; if it's going to fall, it will fall sideways.
- Always let the operator know when you are within that circle. It is unlikely the operator can see you if you're there, and it's unlikely the operator's every thought is devoted to where you just happen to be or not be.
- Remember when you were little, and your parents told you to look both ways before crossing the street? Apply the same concept to watching out for the lift.

Note that the above precautions also provide considerable protection against being beamed by a heavy object inadvertently dropped from the lift. Even a light object can cause serious injury.

- Have your hardhat and safety glasses on at all times. A bit of scrap falling 15 feet into your eye could blind you permanently in that eye. A screwdriver banging onto your hardhat will be an annoyance, but the same screwdriver banging onto the bridge of your nose could cause permanent disfigurement. Banging onto the top of your skull isn't so great, either.
- Remind the operator to keep the platform clean. The standard procedure involves putting scraps and unused tools into a bucket and lowering the bucket to the ground crew. Ensure that bucket is lowered from the short dimension (end) of the platform, not the long dimension (side). This not only reduces the risk of toppling, it puts the ground crew out of the topple path and out of the area where most "oops, I dropped it" incidents occurs. If the lift uses hydraulics, don't stand near any hose connections. You just never know.