



THE RISKS OF OPERATING MEWPS FROM THE GROUND CONTROLS TOOLBOX TALK

Mobile Elevating Work Platforms (MEWPs) are supplied with both ground and platform controls to comply with International MEWP design standards.

Manufacturer’s operators’ manuals identify that the primary operator control station is in the platform and that the ground controls should only be used to carry out pre-use inspections without anyone in the platform, or for emergency descent purposes only.

WHY SHOULD YOU ONLY OPERATE MEWPS FROM THE PLATFORM CONTROLS?

MEWP ground controls do not normally have proportional controls like a joystick in the platform. This means that once a ground control switch is activated there is only one speed, and when activated the function is instant.

MEWP platform controls are made up of function switches and proportional controls such as drive, lift/lower and slew etc. Having proportional controls means you have a much finer control and more accuracy with the movements of the MEWP compared to the ground controls where the functions are instant.

WHAT ARE THE HAZARDS AND RISKS?

Item	Hazards/risks	Possible negative outcomes
1	Loss of “proportionality” in MEWP controls.	Increased risk of entrapment and crushing to platform occupants.
2	Boom turntable slew function used by the ground control operator.	Increased risk of crushing for the ground control operator at the base control position.
3	Loss of depth perception by the ground control operator.	Increased risk of entrapment and crushing to platform occupants.

WHO NEEDS TO KNOW?

This Toolbox Talk applies to all individuals involved with the safe operation of a MEWP, including:

- User (who has control of the use of the MEWP on site)
- Managers and Supervisors
- Ground rescue personnel

4	Loss of depth perception by the ground control operator.	Increased risk of electrocution for the platform occupants and the ground control operator.
5	Loss of proportional controls/depth perception by ground control operator.	Increased risk of equipment and property damage.
6	Unable to hear or see warning devices specific to the MEWP.	Increased risk of equipment and property damage.
7	Loss of communication caused by excess noise, weather conditions and the distance from the platform to the base of the MEWP.	All of the above.

EXCEPTIONS

Vehicle mounted MEWPs and some self-propelled equipment are sometimes operated from the ground controls with personnel or equipment fitted in the platform, this is especially common in the media/film industry. In these circumstances it is recommended to only use MEWPs with ground controls which have speed controllers fitted to achieve finer movements.

REMEMBER

- Always carry out pre-inspections and ensure the MEWP is working to the manufacturer’s instructions.
- Always have a rescue plan in place for all work at height. The rescue plan should be documented, practiced, and communicated to all involved in the task.
- The nominated ground rescue personnel should be included in the rescue plan and be familiar with all the ground controls including emergency lowering procedures.
- Never exceed any operating limits as defined by the manufacturer in the operator’s manual.

USEFUL REFERENCES

- IPAF Operators Safety Guide (available on the ePAL app www.ipaf.org/ePAL)
- IPAF Guidance on Emergency Rescue (available at www.ipaf.org/resources)
- Andy Access Posters (available at www.ipaf.org/andyaccess)
- IPAF Toolbox Talk ‘MEWP Rescue Plan’ (available at www.ipaf.org/toolboxtalks)