

## Harnessing the Necessity?

With the new Working at Height Regulations in place one controversial question which is still being asked in construction and other industries where MEWPs are used is 'should a full body safety harness and fall restraint system be mandatory when working in articulating and telescopic boom platforms, apart from working over water.'

Roofing Magazine has noted that over the last few years IPAF (International Powered Access Federation) and the CPA (Construction Plant-hire Association) have mounted campaigns in a bid to get all operators of such platforms to wear full body harnesses and fall restraint systems attached to baskets for every job, SUBJECT TO A RISK ASSESSMENT. Tim Whiteman IPAF Managing Director said ' We want the HSE to be much stronger in following this through because this will stop people being killed'

One man with twenty years of experience in the industry has a very strong personal opinion on the subject is Mr Gordon Leicester Managing Director of Facelift Access Hire. Talking about the subject at the IPAF summit in May he has spoken out and given us all food for thought. Read on.

*'If you got into a car before the use of seat belts became law would you risk assess the situation before getting in? no, you got in and drove choosing whether to wear one or not because you had a choice. Even though almost every one was aware of the dangers through the Governments Clunk Click campaign only 43% of front seat passengers chose to wear one. Then the choice was taken away from us with the introduction of the seatbelt law in 1983 and seat belt usage jumped to 93% overnight.. My point is, with the knowledge we have and the dangers we know exist in that machines can suffer mechanical failures or be struck by vehicles throwing the operators out, we should make the use of harnesses mandatory, with the one exception of when working near or over water, this is where the greatest risk is of the machine falling into water and an operator would be at risk of drowning. I feel that the choice of risk assessment should be taken away.'*



Mr Leicester believes that the only way to make this happen is for IPAF to introduce new rules into their training programme whereby as with driving licences, penalty points are issued for offences committed in exactly the same way that if you don't wear a seatbelt you are fined up to £500.00. With the PAL card you could be given similar penalties and when you reach twelve you licence is taken away from you for a year and so on and so forth. Penalty points not a fine being the option here.

Mr Leicester believes that if IPAF were to adopt this they could also incorporate the use of timbers under jacklegs, which we know are a major contributor to fatal accidents. He felt that it was also important to remember that powered access platforms are extremely safe machines and it is estimated that in the UK there are approximately 50 million man hours worked in MEWPs annually, with approximately two incidents per annum, making them one of the safest forms of access there is.

This is food for thought, and its possible that we need more opinions, statistics and evaluations, as with safety belts, to help us make our own informed decisions.

For further information you can visit [www.ipaf.co.uk](http://www.ipaf.co.uk) for the IPAF Technical Guidance Note:H Safety Harnesses in Mobile Elevating Work Platforms.

Alternatively the HSE Information Leaflet MISC614 Preventing Falls From Boom-type mobile elevating platforms, here you will also find further information on Preventing Falls and the use of Harnesses and Lanyards in MEWPS, see [www.hse.gov.co.uk](http://www.hse.gov.co.uk)

