

INDUSTRY GUIDANCE – WORKING OVER WATER

Overview:

Operating MEWPs over or near water presents additional hazards, including persons in the platform falling into water. The hazards associated with water should be considered during selection of equipment for this type of work.

Risks from the hazards identified shall be managed in accordance with site specific procedures prepared by a competent person. The risk management plan shall be documented.

The following shall be considered:

- Impact of weather conditions (e.g., wind and rain resulting in flash flooding, sodden ground, and rough waters).
- The likelihood of subsidence of the ground.
- How to retrieve a person in the platform, which may be submerged.
- How to rescue a person who has fallen into the water.
- Whether a harness or flotation device is more appropriate for the particular operation.
- Placing life buoys in easily accessible locations.

General control measures

The following risk control measures should be implemented as appropriate:

- Use of a spotter.
- Method of communication between the spotter and the operator.
- Prevention of travel.
- Use of a rescue boat located in the vicinity, but outside the zone where objects could fall.
- Selection of the MEWP, including the tyres or tracks, which may reduce the ground pressure.

Working from a barge pontoon

A competent person, such as a naval architect, shall assess:

- that the vessel is capable of supporting the weight of the MEWP, moving loads, point loads from wheels, and the like.
- that the vessel and MEWP combination shall remain stable.
- the impact of depth, tide changes, waves and water flow and floods.
- the wakes caused by passing vessels; and
- that the chassis inclination will remain within the manufacturer's recommendations in all working positions when subjected to pre-determined worst operational environmental conditions.

Means shall be provided to prevent the MEWP inadvertently traveling over the edge of the vessel. The MEWP should travel at creep speed when being set up on the vessel.

Working near water

The following additional factors shall be considered when the MEWP needs to work near water:

- Possibility of the MEWP tipping into water.
- That the ground conditions, including embankments or riverbeds, are suitable for the MEWP selected for use.
- Impact of depth, tide changes, water flow, and floods on stability of the MEWP.
- Impact of water flow changing the ground conditions, including eroding the surface around the wheels and outriggers.
- The following additional control measures should be implemented:
 - Setting up the MEWP on a firm level surface.
 - Providing larger packing under outriggers to suit the ground conditions.
 - Monitoring ground conditions beneath the machine at regular intervals whilst operating.
 - Regular monitoring of outrigger feet to ensure that they remain centralized on spreader boards.
 - Wearing a harness whilst positioned over ground.

The competent person in control of the site should supply relevant information about the ground bearing capacity, terrain, gradient, base area, load bearing capability of supporting structures and any localized ground features, such as trenches, manholes and uncompacted backfill, which could lead to overturning.

Personal fall protection equipment when working over water

Where the operator of a MEWP is working over water, additional risk assessment and measures shall be taken to ascertain if using a personal fall protection is appropriate, i.e. is the risk from drowning if the worker or the platform falls into the water greater than the risk of injury to the worker from falling from height off the working platform.

If there is a greater risk of drowning, appropriate life jackets in accordance with AS4758.1 or personal flotation devices should be worn and any risk from fall from height should be controlled by means other than the use of harnesses. Both harnesses and flotation devices may be used by the operator. They should not be used simultaneously. The site conditions should determine when each type is worn. Have a rescue plan in place and consider the extra hazards working near water can create.

NOTE: A person who has fallen into water may not be able to detach their lanyard from the work platform.

References:

AS2550.10:2025, 5.19 Working over water

Silvercard MEWP Training Course US23966

Worksafe Mobile Elevating Work Platforms Best Practise Guide, 2.4 Hazard controls