

GETTING ON TOP OF EWP's

Elevated work platforms (EWP's) and scissor lifts are great tools for trades to gain access to heights safely and effectively. The choice of the correct type of access system and safe work methods required for these are vital for the wellbeing of those who work at heights.

Who can use an EWP or scissor lift?

Some classifications of Height access machines require a high-risk work license to operate, some site rules require operators to have competency assessments, and others require special training to be in certain high-risk areas such as around live lines.

Operators of elevated work platforms with a boom over 11 meters must have a high-risk license to operate. These are issued by the government regulator after proof that training has taken place by an RTO and competency has been assessed. EWP's under 11 meters, and scissor lifts don't require a high-risk license however operators should be assessed as competent before operating.

Assessment can be either by the person in charge of the machine deeming the operator capable, or by an RTO/ training provider training the operator and assessing their skills. An industry competency card known as a yellow card is typically issued after this. The yellow card is not a regulatory requirement, but it is proof the person who holds it has been trained and assessed in the machinery listed on the card by the card issuer.

EWP's and scissor lifts driven on public roads may need traffic control, possibly limited road use registration and a suitable road vehicle license (usually issued as "undefined vehicle" category, and which is attached to the operator's vehicle license). Truck mounted EWP's that are road registered will need a suitable category of vehicle license for the base vehicle.

EWP's with booms require PPE (harnesses) to be worn when operating, even with the boom lowered. If a problem occurs the operator could be flung from the basket if not properly restrained. Full harnesses are required, with hitch points in the basket and fall arrest devices. Most scissor lifts have railings around the basket which are at a height that it allows operators to not need a harness, however, check the operating manual for the machine to confirm recommended precautions to take and PPE required. However, some sites may require a harness to be worn by all operators along with safety helmets and other appropriate PPE.



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When operating an EWP, great care should be taken to follow manufacturers specifications for suitable operation of the machine. Log books should be examined before use to ensure there are no problems with the machine and the recommended checks should be done (oil, water, batteries, tyres, booms, controls, estops, leveling devices etc). Ensuring someone is a competent person to operate a machine will also include their ability to adequately assess the fitness of that machine prior to use.

Location also plays an important role in the selection of suitable equipment to use. An indoor or flat surface type machine may be unsuitable for rough, soft or uneven terrain use. Internal combustion engine powered machines will produce exhaust gases that are dangerous for use inside a building without extra precautions being taken. Machines without leveling devices are generally unsuited to setup on slopes.

Machinery should be selected to ensure compliance with safe access around overhead electrical services lines. Specialist insulated booms, and the pre-requisite electricity network access training is required to work on or near electricity networks. This includes tasks such as tree lopping, building work, and electricity network access work. These machines are specially built, and tested regularly, and rated for various levels of network voltage levels particular to their set purpose. Even hoses and fittings for hydraulic lines on these machines are made from special non-conductive materials in the insulated zones. Safety observers may be required in certain situations in closer proximity to exclusion zones around power network overhead lines, and this should be identified before work commences.

Safety observers may be needed where hazards present such as working near, a road, structures, excavations and edges or around other trades.

Weight plays an important factor. Look at the capacity of the machine, and remember human beings are heavy creatures, we tend to have equipment and tools that also have a decent amount of weight, and that's before we put all the components or fittings we are fitting into the basket. If close to the specified weight limit and you are removing equipment such as a heavy old street light, remember when that weight lands in the basket it may push the machine past its safe limits, which can result in the machine cutting out on overload (the author may be speaking from personal experience here.....)

Under no circumstances should untrained or unqualified operators be working a machine. Fatalities have resulted from inexperienced people operating elevated work platforms. The machines can very quickly be put into an unsafe position or be driven into surrounding buildings, machinery, plant or electricity lines.

EWP's can be privately purchased, and these machines are a significant investment. They also require regular machinery inspections and component replacements to remain in a safe and registered state. Unregistered / uninspected vehicles should not be operated, and the person in charge of the work has a responsibility to ensure all workers have safe work environments, which include the machinery and vehicles they operate. Due to these costs, unless a machine is in frequent use it may be cheaper to hire EWP's for the job at hand.

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Some hire companies will give substantial discounts for long term or frequent hire. When a machine is brought to site many Principal contractors will require that machine to be “inducted”, where its serial number and identification is recorded and the machine inspected by the site safety person or a nominated competent site person before it is allowed to be used. Ensure if you do bring machinery to a site that the machine is parked in a designated area or safe spot, and that the keys are removed at the end of use period. Machinery should not be used without the express permission of the person in charge of that machine.

If an EWP is made unsafe to operate by mechanical failure or accident it should be removed from service and tagged out. Logbooks need to be updated with the details of the failure, and the person in charge of the machine notified that repair or replacement is required. The EWP should not be operated again until the logbook is filled out to explain repairs undertaken by a qualified person, and if needed re-inducted to site.



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