

SSOW 17: MEWP EMERGENCY RESCUE PLAN

Issue Number: 04

Date of Issue: 31/01/2026







Based on: RA32

PURPOSE

To ensure a safe and effective rescue can be carried out if a MEWP becomes stranded at height due to malfunction, operator incapacity, or failure of control systems. This SSOW sets out the required emergency procedures, competency expectations, and equipment standards needed to lower the platform safely in accordance with RA32, legal requirements, and site-specific rules.

PPE REQUIREMENTS

For this activity, the following PPE must be worn

					
☒	☒	☒	☒	☐	☐
High-vis Vest / Jacket (BS EN 471)	Safety Boots (EN ISO 20345:2011) (S3)	Safety Helmet (EN 397:1995)	Safety Harness (EN 358)		

TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

- MEWP operator training and valid competency for the specific machine type.
- Familiarisation with MEWP ground controls and auxiliary/emergency lowering systems.
- Designated ground rescue person trained and authorised to operate ground controls.
- Awareness of RA32 and the site-specific MEWP rescue plan.
- Understanding of communication procedures between operator, line manager, and rescue person.
- Knowledge of when and how to escalate to engineering support.

EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS

- MEWP with fully functioning normal and auxiliary lowering systems.
- Operator's manual available on the machine at all times.
- Operational communication devices (mobile phone or radio).
- Safety harness and lanyard (EN 358) for all personnel in the platform.
- Access to contact details for competent service engineers.
- Clear access to ground control panels and emergency lowering points.

SAFE SYSTEM OF WORK

Introduction

When MEWPs are used there is always the risk of persons in the work platform becoming stranded at height due to MEWP malfunction, breakdown or an outside influence. This risk can be significantly reduced through using well-maintained equipment, conducting a pre-use inspection, including function checks and the MEWP being operated by a trained, competent operator. These factors will significantly reduce any potential risk. It is however, still essential that plans are put in place to rescue persons in the work platform.

Legislation

Health and safety legislation requires that safe systems of work are in place for all work activities and the references for the requirement to provide a means of safe rescue are:

- Work at Height Regulations 2005 – Regulation 4(2)
- Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 – Regulation 5(1)(d)
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 – Regulation 3

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- CDM 2015 - Regulation 30 on Emergency Procedures
- The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 - Sections 2 & 3 also set out general duties that require this.

Rescue Plan

Normal and auxiliary control systems built into a mobile elevating work platform (MEWP) will allow the operator to bring the platform of the machine safely to ground level under controlled conditions. It is extremely unusual not to be able to lower the platform using these controls or for all of these systems to fail. The ground key must always be available on ground level.

Whenever a MEWP is in use, a competent and authorised person in the vicinity of the MEWP should be designated as the 'nominated ground rescue person'. This person will be familiar with the ground controls of the MEWP and have practiced lowering the platform. They will be fully briefed on the rescue plan and identified to the MEWP operator.

In the case of emergency rescue being required, the MEWP operator should in the first instance contact their Line Manager. If however, they are not contactable the operator should contact the nominated ground rescue person directly for assistance.

Communication

Effective communication between the MEWP operator and their Line Manager and nominated ground rescue person is essential for the rescue plan to be carried out successfully. Operators, Line Managers and ground rescue persons must have an operational phone with them at all times. Consideration must be taken on background noise, environment and mobile device signal strength prior to the work commencing.

In areas where there is poor signal strength hand-held radios will be used.

Mid-Air Rescue

A mid-air, platform to platform rescue should only be considered in exceptional circumstances and only after:

- All normal and auxiliary lowering procedures have been attempted, and these are unable to lower the platform.
- Site management have contacted the competent and authorised service engineer listed in the rescue plan, to report failure of normal and auxiliary lowering systems and request engineering assistance.

If after inspection by the competent engineering assistance, it is not possible to affect a timely repair to allow the machine to be brought to the ground safely, senior site management should be contacted for permission to carry out mid-air rescue.

Or

Where the competent engineering assistance is not readily available and an immediate risk exists to the health and safety of any of the occupants from remaining in the elevated basket until an engineer can attend, then senior site management should be contacted for permission to carry out mid-air rescue.

Code of Practice for Mid-air Rescue

- Rescue using another MEWP should only be performed once a site-specific risk assessment has been carried out and a specific plan has been documented and approved by senior management.
- The rescue machine must be positioned so as to enable the rescue procedure to be carried out without compromising the safety of any personnel involved in the rescue procedure.
- The platforms of both machines must be adjacent to each other with a minimal gap between them, unless exceptional circumstances mean this is not possible. (Where this is not possible, the circumstances shall be recorded onto the risk assessment form.)
- Where reasonably practicable, precautions should be taken to prevent inadvertent movement of both platforms during the transfer.
- The person being rescued (transferred from basket to basket) should wear a full body harness with an adjustable lanyard – the lanyard should be attached to the anchor point on the rescue machine before

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MEWP Emergency Lowering/Ground Controls

Operating emergency lowering systems can vary significantly from machine to machine. Operators, Line Managers and nominated ground rescue persons must be familiar and trained in the controls of the MEWP prior to work commencing.

MEWP's must always have the operators manual available with the machine. Inside the manual will be clear instructions on how to use the machines emergency lowering system.

Operators must ensure that ground controls/ emergency lowering systems can be accessed if parked close to a structure.

Emergency lowering systems are intended for use in the event that the main power supply fails e.g. Loss of fuel. If the power supply is available, use the lower controls. Before attempting to lower the platform always check to see that the lowering path is clear of obstructions.

There are 4 main types of emergency lowering systems fitted to MEWPS:

1. Auxiliary Power Motor (APU)
2. Emergency lowering cable
3. Hand pumps
4. Bleed down valves

As part of the pre use inspection both ground and cage controls must be checked to ensure that they are fully functioning. This should also include emergency lowering controls.

- Check that all emergency stop buttons/switches are working correctly
- Ensure that the user guide has been read and understood both all involved in the operation. Note that controls differ for machines and must be familiarised prior to work commencing.
- All involved in the operation including the operator, nominated ground rescue person and Line Manager must be briefed on the emergency rescue plan.

NEVER:

- Exit the machine at height unless there is no other possible safe way of doing the job. A full risk assessment and method statement must be conducted prior to any such operations taking place.
- Allow an untrained person to operate the MEWP or the emergency ground controls. This is the Line Manager and operators duty.
- Misuse, abuse or override any safety systems. These systems are to protect both the operator, the machine and those around you.
- Use steps, ladders or stand on guardrails to gain additional height. If you need additional height then a large machine is required.
- Use the MEWP as a jack or prop, hoisting loads under the cage is not permitted unless the machine is designed to do so by the manufacturer.
- Attempt to exit the cage by climbing down the boom or scissor stack.

What is required?

You will be provided with a documented emergency rescue plan BEFORE you elevate. The rescue plan will identify how the MEWP will be returned to ground level or a safe area, in case of an incident at height. The rescue plan identifies who is (are) the nominated ground rescue person(s).

The operator should test the functionality of the ground and auxiliary emergency lowering systems during the pre-use inspection.

The nominated ground rescue person(s) should be available and at ground level when the MEWP is in use; be familiarised with the MEWPs ground and auxiliary/emergency controls; practice the rescue procedures through rescue drills; have a method of communication with the MEWP operator and platform occupants.

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What should the MEWP user do?

- Identify and train and familiarise nominated ground rescue person(s).
- MEWP manufacturer instructions have different procedures to lower the platform from the ground and auxiliary/emergency controls.
- Only allow MEWP to be operated after a documented rescue plan is in place and practiced.
- Brief operators to position the MEWP such that the ground control and any rescue control panels are fully accessible to the nominated ground rescue person(s).

The nominated ground rescue person(s) must be made aware of site constraints and hazards when operating the lowering systems. They must know the manufacturer's instructions to safely control the MEWP platform to a safe rescue position. They must also perform regular drills to avoid panic.

IDENTIFIED RISKS

The SSOW above has been compiled after identifying the following risks from this activity

- Failure of upper control functions while elevated
- Failure of the operator to be able to operate the MEWP functions while elevated due to one of the following reasons:
 - Operator incapacitated
 - Auxiliary functions fail to operate from upper control station
- Failure of normal ground conditions
- Failure of all normal and auxiliary lowering functions

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE REFER TO RISK ASSESSMENT RA32

Owner: Head of HSQE	Version: 2	LF266
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