

Semi-automatic quick hitches on hired excavators: CPA guidance for customers



Accidents with semi-automatic quick hitches

Semi-automatic quick hitches require the operator to manually insert a retaining safety pin in the hitch. The majority of incidents these systems occur where the operator failed to insert the safety pin. The bucket then comes off the hitch, often causing fatal or major injuries.

Continuing to use semi-automatic quick hitches

After 1 October 2008, you will not be able to buy new semi-automatic quick hitches, because the Health and Safety Executive have asked manufacturers to stop supplying them. However, HSE have not “banned” semi-automatic quick hitches. You will still be able to hire them and use them, provided they are used properly and safely. The checklists below will help you in this.

For further information, see the HSE Safety Alert on Quick Hitches. This is available at: www.hse.gov.uk/construction/quickhitch.htm, or by calling the HSE Infoline on 0845 345 0055.

General management

- Site supervision should know if the quick hitches on the excavators under their control require a manual safety pin.
- Is the risk of bucket detachment covered by the risk assessment? What are the management systems for checking whether manual safety pins are always in place?
- Have excavator operators been trained in the use of their quick hitches? The CITB course did not cover quick hitches until mid-2008, so a CPCS card may not demonstrate competence in use of quick hitches. For information on suitable training courses, contact:
 - CPCS: 0870 417 7274, www.cskills.org
 - CPA: 020 7796 3366, www.cpa.uk.net

Checking the excavator

- Is there a manual or instruction card for the quick hitch available in the cab? It can also be useful to have a warning label to remind the driver to fit the safety pin. (These are available from CPA, and some sites might require them).
- Is there a checklist in the cab of daily and weekly inspection and maintenance of the excavator? Does it include a check of the quick hitch and lubrication? The check should confirm:
 - the quick hitch is functioning properly,
 - the latch moves smoothly,
 - there are no missing or broken parts,
 - hydraulic hoses are in good condition.
- Is there a record of the inspection and maintenance actually carried out?

Checking the operator's competence

- Does the operator what sort of quick hitch system he has, and whether it needs a safety pin or not?
- Does the operator know how to visually check that the quick hitch is locked?
- Does the operator know that, for all types of quick hitch, he should test the security of the bucket after changing it? And does he know how to do it?

Checking the work

- Site supervisors should check whether the safety pins are inserted where appropriate. If the pin is missing, work must stop until the pin has been properly put in place, and the operator's knowledge and compliance with safe working practice confirmed.
- Safe systems of work should ensure that ground workers are not exposed to risk by working below the bucket, for example, in excavations.

Maintaining and examining the excavator

- Any loose pins or clips which may be easily lost should be retained or attached to the quick hitch.
- The area around safety pin insertion holes can be painted to make it clear to operators and site supervision that the pin should be inserted there.
- Some hire companies have modified the safety pin so that it cannot be fully removed from the hitch. The hire company will be able to confirm that modifications have been approved by the quick hitch manufacturer.
- If the hitch is permanently attached to the excavator ensure that the hitch is part of the thorough examination of the machine. If it is not permanently attached, it should be considered a lifting accessory, and subject to a thorough examination at least every 6 months. Confirm with the hire company who will be responsible for arranging the examinations.