



STRATEGIC FORUM PLANT SAFETY GROUP

SAFETY NOTICE - 16/11/09

**Issued by Construction Plant-hire Association
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STRATEGIC FORUM PLANT SAFETY GROUP - QUICK HITCHES SAFETY NOTICE

In the light of continued fatalities, serious injuries and near hits involving the unsafe use of quick hitches, the Strategic Forum Plant Safety Group is issuing a Safety Notice, reinforcing the guidance issued to contractors earlier in the year. This press release also clarifies other issues concerning safe use of quick hitches, recognising that employers have their own safe systems of work for the use of quick hitches. It is recommended that all employers use the safety notice as a check list to review their own procedures.

The Strategic Forum Plant Safety Group is an industry wide consensus group. HSE are members of the Quick Hitch working panel, and this Safety Notice has been prepared in conjunction with them.

SAFETY NOTICE: Ten steps that contractors, plant owners and other duty holders should be taking now.

These precautions are applicable to all types of quick hitch - manual, semi automatic, and all fully automatic types, including those that lock onto both pins.

1. Keep other workers away from the machine's working range. Never work under the bucket or attachment. Ensure that your site supervisors enforce this rule.
2. Make sure that your operators are aware of their personal and legal responsibility to use all quick hitches safely. Serious misuse of quick hitches should always be treated as gross misconduct which could well lead to dismissal.
3. Operators should be made aware that criminal convictions for misuse of quick hitches have already led to prison sentences for operators.
4. Check that **all** operators confirm that the quick hitch is properly engaged every time they change an attachment. It is essential that this is done by close inspection at the quick hitch, which will normally entail the operator getting down from the cab. It is best practice to make this a requirement for **all** quick hitches.
5. Check that site supervisors understand that the operator has to fully confirm that the quick hitch is properly engaged. Make sure site supervisors allow operators time to do this.
6. Check that site supervisors monitor that operators are confirming proper engagement, by spot checks.
7. Check that machines are in good order, and all quick hitches are included in the maintenance plan and subject to proper maintenance.
8. Check that operators and maintenance personnel have specific instructions for the combination of machine, quick hitch and attachment.

9. Confirm that your operators are competent to use the specific quick hitch in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and your safe system of work.
10. Forbid practices such as "pick and place" (moving attachments without properly engaging the locking devices).

Using quick hitches with other attachments

Contractors may want to use quick hitches with attachments other than a bucket in normal configuration. However, if a specific application, such as the fitting of vibratory hammers or reversing of buckets, is not explicitly allowed by the manufacturer, the user should assume that it is not allowed, and should not use the quick hitch for this attachment or application. Quick hitches should only be used with attachments and in applications as specified by the manufacturer.

Types of quick hitch

The Strategic Forum Plant Safety Group does not recommend or favour any type of quick hitch, whether manual, semi automatic, or any type of fully automatic. There are two reasons for this.

First, all types of quick hitch can be safely used by competent people within a safe system of work. This will involve planning, training, instruction, communication, supervision and maintenance.

Secondly, all types of quick hitch may fail if they are not used and maintained correctly.

Legal status of quick hitches

Concerning the legal status of different types, HSE have not banned the use of existing semi-automatic quick hitches. Since October 2008 there has been a voluntary cessation of supply of new semi-automatic quick hitches by manufacturers, but any ban on existing semi-automatic quick hitches would require regulatory changes and HSE do not have any plans for this. Some reports have suggested that regulations will change in 2010 - but there are no such changes in the law.

As the regulator, HSE has considered the widest implications of regulatory and enforcement action, and decided upon the most appropriate course to be taken to achieve the best level of safety, not just for large contractors, but also individual owner operators and those in other industries, such as agriculture.

The outcome is that all types of existing quick hitch can continue to be used: the type selected must be determined by the employer, taking into account the competencies within their organisation.

European Standards

A revised version of the European Standard EN474 is likely to be approved in 2010. This will not directly affect quick hitch design and will not make any sort of hitch illegal.

Work is continuing on further revisions of European and International standards - this will lead to developments in quick hitch design in future. The work is led by HSE, in conjunction with quick hitch manufacturers and the Construction Equipment Association (CEA).

If any current or future design of quick hitch is proven to be deficient, then there are remedies under the Supply of Machinery (Safety) Regulations 2008.

Frequently asked questions

Guidance on other issues concerning quick hitches can be found at the Strategic Forum Plant Safety Group website (www.cpa.uk.net/p/Plant-Safety-Group/). However, this additional guidance does not form part of the Safety Notice and is not necessary for the safe use of quick hitches.

Notes for editors

1. The Strategic Forum for Construction is the only construction forum that seeks to represent the whole of the construction community. It comprises senior members of the constituent organisations who are committed to addressing the health and safety issues of the construction industry through ownership, leadership and partnership.
2. The Strategic Forum Plant Safety Group was formed by the Strategic Forum Health and Safety Group in December 2008. The Plant Safety Group is chaired by Colin Wood, Chief Executive of the Construction Plant-hire Association (CPA).
3. The Strategic Forum Plant Safety Group is an industry - wide consensus group. It is supported by HSE who are represented on all working groups.
4. The aim of the Strategic Forum Plant Safety Group is to bring about a continuous reduction in the rate of injuries and ill health caused through the operation and installation of plant in the construction industry. To achieve this aim, contractors, safety specialists, training organisations, plant hirers, manufacturers and unions are all represented on the group, as well as the HSE.
5. Construction Plant-hire Association is a trade association for plant hire companies. Established for over sixty years, the Association has over 1500 members throughout the UK, representing 85% of the plant hire industry.

For more information

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