

Heavy lifting

Not paying attention to a lift's load capacity can get you into trouble

The accident: Three construction workers in a scissor lift were removing a planter box from the exterior wall of a parking deck. The workers were shoveling dirt and gravel into a plastic trash container situated on the lift's platform in an attempt to make the box lighter prior to removal. When the workers tried to pull the box from the wall, the box struck the lift, knocking it over. One of the workers fell 20 feet to the ground below. He was transported by emergency medical services to a hospital, where he died from his injuries.

The bottom line: The construction company's foreman noted that morning that the scissor lift to be used was rated for 500 pounds, which would not support the weight of the three workers, the tools they would be using, and the planter box and contents. He told one worker to wait for the rest of the crew, and he would get them a larger lift. When the other two crewmembers arrived, they were unaware of the situation, and all three workers got into the scissor lift and fully extended it to gain access to the planter box. Once the workers had emptied some of the dirt and gravel from the box, they tried to pull it from the wall, creating an unstable rocking motion that made the lift easy to tip over once the planter broke free.

Follow the numbers

Specs such as lift capacity are not guidelines; they're hard and fast



Illustration by Don Lomax

rules to follow that are designed to keep you and your fellow crewmembers safe. In this accident, the 500-pound load capacity of the scissor lift was exceeded by the combined weight of the three workers, the materials handled and the planter box itself. Although the foreman recognized the capacity problem, the chain of communication was broken when the entire crew was not notified a larger lift would be made available. Furthermore, the workers using the lift should have been able to gauge the lift was too small based on their training on working at height. Here are a couple of things to keep in mind when working on a lift:

Size matters. Before you begin work, take note of the lift's capacity, and assess the combined weight of everything on the platform, including workers, materials and

tools. If you're going to be engaging in an application that is likely to move the platform in any way, make sure your lift has outriggers deployed throughout the job.

Remember your training. Working at height presents a different set of dangers than working on the ground. Your employer will have provided specific training on this topic, which you should complete prior to beginning any job that will require you to use a lift. Make sure you use the appropriate fall protection system, and familiarize yourself with the specific model of lift you'll be using. If it is a rental unit, take time to go over the manual – which they are required to provide with the machine – and go over any machine features specific to the lift you'll be operating. If you feel the lift is undersized or inappropriate for the task at hand, alert your supervisor at once.

Information for this Safety Watch is from an accident report, the California Department of Public Health's Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation program and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. It is meant for general information only.

Date of safety talk: _____ Leader: _____
 Attending: _____

