



Working with Elevated Work Platforms

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The use of scaffolding is an indispensable part of the entertainment industry. It is a source of employment for many IATSE workers who erect and operate the different types of scaffold. They are put up by stagehands, grips, carpenters, and convention workers. They are used as stages, to hold scenery, to elevate equipment, and performers, to create work positions, and provide access to hard to reach places.

Scaffold comes in many shapes and sizes. This means from traditional metal or wood structures to scissors and boom lifts to a boatswain's chairs to two sawhorses with a platform between them.

When this equipment is used correctly it allows many jobs to be done and done safely. Tens of thousands of hours are worked erecting, dismantling, and working on scaffolding every year in North America with no one getting hurt. But, like any human endeavor, if you don't respect the potential danger involved with the activity you will not act in a safe way. In the first half of this decade, an average of 88 workers a year died working on scaffolding in the United States.

IATSE members are not immune to accidents from this equipment. Personnel man lifts fall over far too often. Crews need to remember that the outriggers are required for safe operation. Scaffolds need to have proper planks or platforms and guardrail. This includes positions for audio/visual boards and projectors one section high to 60 foot towers. Access to the elevated work platform can be a risk. Workers walk the arms of boom lifts. People are asked to climb a scaffold to access the platform rather than having a proper ladder or stairway. Repelling out of the basket of a lift may be fun but not a great idea.

So what do IATSE members need to know about scaffold?

Like everything our employers do the use of an elevated work platform system should be part of an employer's plan. The scaffold plan is a subset of the larger work plan. As part of a plan there are a number of steps to follow: Choose the right kind of platform system for the job. Train the people who will be building and taking down scaffolding. Train the

people who will be on the scaffold. Train the people who will be operating mechanical platforms. Inspect the equipment before and during use. Use the system within its limits. And, keep your concentration while using it.

Choosing the right platform system is important. Things to consider are: How much equipment and/or people need to go on it? What kind of space restrictions are there? Can the surface or structure where it will be used support the system? What kind of access needs to be provided? How ridged does it have to be? What other kinds of forces may act on the system? Is the system flexible enough for the job? These are just a few of the questions to ask about the choice.

Training comes in a couple of forms. Because of the potential hazards the training needs to include OSHA requirements. For traditional type scaffold, erection and dismantling training is required. Aerial lifts also require instruction on the equipment. Like most things we do, it is supposed to be done by a qualified person. If you don't feel qualified to do a certain job you should request training. Anyone who works on a scaffold is supposed to be given "Scaffold Hazard Awareness" training. This covers the basics of what kinds of hazards to look for.

All systems used by workers require some level of inspection. Elevated work platforms may require many levels. At the beginning of a job the equipment is supposed to be inspected. This means looking for broken and bent components. For mechanical platforms check for leaks, and that the machine is operating properly. Each day before a scaffold is used it needs to be inspected. Each lift operator should inspect the lift and familiarize himself with the controls of the lift before they begin working. The area where the platform will be working must be inspected. Are there drop off, holes, power lines, damaged support structures, or any of a hundred things?

The last consideration is the need to keep your concentration. Stay off your phone while driving a lift or pushing a scaffold. Turn off the radio if it is distracting. Pay attention as you are climbing to get to the work position.

Elevated work platform are a necessary part of IATSE jobs. They are used daily in most venues worked. Used properly they allow workers to do their jobs easier, more efficient, and safer.