



Manlifts: An Old Tool with Hidden Risks

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For a number of months I have been contacted by members about the continuing problems with “man lifts” (vertical personnel lifts). A number of accidents have occurred recently to once again remind us of the potential dangers that exist with these pieces of equipment.

Vertical personnel lifts are the single person lifts used throughout industries and businesses. They are efficient and economical means for getting up in the air to do a job. They can be more stable than ladders, are faster and more mobile than most scaffolds, and can have a reach from 20 to 100 feet.

But, these lifts have limitations. Only one person can be in the basket at a time. Most are only supposed to be used indoors on a flat and level floor. Their lifting capacity is low. They also have stabilizing devices which can limit the mobility of the lift.

Because of the utility and economy of these machines we often see them in places where IATSE sisters and brothers work. Theaters, banquet rooms, convention halls, sports venues, movie and television sets, concert halls, rental facilities, and traveling shows all have them and use them. They are a great tool, but when used improperly they will tip over injuring or killing people.

Some workers say, “I’ve used these things for years. I’ve never seen one that went over.” Well I have, more than once. It is unnerving to come to work one morning and see the lift, fully extended, lying on the floor. You know that someone you work with was in it when it went over.

The lifts go over for many reasons:

- They are not on level ground.
- The outriggers are not being used.
- Workers are pushing the lift while elevated.
- The person in the basket is pulling themselves along while elevated.
- The lift is made unlevel by the improper use of the leveling jacks.

- The basket is overloaded.
- A piece of equipment is being pulled up to the basket by someone on the ground, and they pull the lift over.
- It is used outside in the wind.
- The person in the basket over reaches the guardrail and causes a tip hazard.
- An unstable floor or platform causes a tip over.
- Using something other than the manufacturer recommended method for leveling.
- Tying something off to the basket and then lowering or raising the lift.

These are all risks to the stability of these lifts. This is not a complete list of potential risks, but for the most part these things are preventable. Here are some things you can do to protect yourself:

- Attend any employer training on these pieces of equipment.
- Read and follow the operating instructions which are supposed to be provided on every machine.
- Always use the outriggers or stabilizer as recommended by the manufacturer.
- Use the machine on a stable surface capable of supporting its weight.
- Stay under the lift’s rated capacity.
- Be aware that a side load can make the lift unstable.
- Do not move the lift in an elevated position unless the manufacturer intended it to be used in that way.
- Never disable a safety device.
- Take any equipment out of service that an inspection shows to be damaged or otherwise unusable.

The entertainment industry has been changing over the years in regards to safety. Our employers are telling us that the ways of doing things and equipment that have been used for years have to give way to safer methods and equipment. Many people do not like these changes. They question the motives. They complain that the changes take too much time or they cost too much money or there is no other way to do the job. To protect ourselves and those we work with, we have to find the way. At the end of the day we want to walk away in one piece.