

PRESS RELEASE

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STRATEGIC FORUM PLANT SAFETY GROUP SETS THE RECORD STRAIGHT ON QUICK HITCHES

The Strategic Forum Plant Safety Group panel that is working on quick hitch issues has issued an interim statement to clarify some misunderstandings and misrepresentation about quick hitch safety.

The Plant Safety Group is an industry wide consensus group. It does not recommend or favour any type of quick hitch, whether manual, semi or fully automatic.

The panel has restated that there has been no change in the law regarding the use of existing semi-automatic quick hitches. Kevin Minton of CPA, who is a member of the group, said that "It is not a question of semi-automatic quick hitches being "illegal" - if a Safe System of Work is in place, they can be used. When bad consequences arise, it is generally from ignorance and poor planning."

Shortcomings in the current European standard have caused some problems, and have led some suppliers to suggest that they have the only "legal" quick hitches. However, as long as the quick hitch meets the requirements of the Supply of Machinery (Safety) Regulations, there is no legal issue with them being used safely.

The panel acknowledges that some contractors have recently made their procurement policies public, and notes that some well-informed and considered decisions have been made. "Each contractor has opted for a solution that suits their work, and provided they don't proclaim this to be universally applicable, they should not be criticised for their choice of policy" Mr Minton added. "Every duty holder should make their own fully informed and properly considered decision about how to improve safety in the areas they are responsible for".

The panel has expressed concern over a lack of understanding of contractors' decisions. "To simply report that semi-automatics are banned is incomplete, and does not help with understanding the issues" said Mr Minton. "Some principal contractors have laid down their own technical criteria which they expect quick hitches to meet. This may mean they will not accept many types of quick hitch, including some fully-automatic hitches. Their supply chain partners should confirm with the principal contractor what is acceptable on their sites."

The panel is working on Best Practice Guidance, which will be available later this year. In the interim, it has issued the following eight steps that contractors, plant owners and other duty holders should be taking now. The precautions are applicable to all types of quick hitch - manual, semi automatic, and all fully automatic types.

1. Check that your machines are in good order, and that all quick hitches are included in the maintenance plan and subject to proper maintenance.
2. Check that your operators have specific instructions for the combination of machine, quick hitch and attachment. Your maintenance team needs proper information as well.

3. Check that your operators are competent to use the quick hitch in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, whatever make and model it is.
4. Motivate your operators, using disciplinary procedures where appropriate, to use all quick hitches safely. Forbid practices such as "pick and place" (moving attachments without properly engaging the locking devices).
5. Ensure that **all** operators confirm that the quick hitch is properly engaged every time they change an attachment. *With many quick hitches it is essential that this is done by close inspection at the quick hitch - it is best practice to make this a requirement for **all** quick hitches.*
6. Check that your site supervisors understand what the operator has to do.
7. Ensure your site supervisors to allow operators time to do it, and monitor they are doing it by spot checks.
8. Ensure your site supervisors keep other workers away from the machine's working range. Never work under the bucket or attachment.

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 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 aim of the 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.
4. 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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