



SPECIALIST ACCESS ENGINEERING  
AND MAINTENANCE ASSOCIATION

# Guidance on Using Permanent Suspended Access Equipment

## CONTENTS:

- 1. Duty Holder's Responsibilities**
- 2. Regulations and Standards**
- 3. SAEMA position**
- 4. Purpose**
- 5. Health and Safety**
- 6. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**
- 7. Reporting to Site**
- 8. Communications**
- 9. Pre-Use Checks**
- 10. Rigging Platforms**
- 11. Safe Use of Suspended Access Equipment**
- 12. Breakdowns / Malfunctions**
- 13. Emergencies**
- 14. Completion Of Work**
- 15. Signing Out Procedure**

**Disclaimer:** Whilst every effort has been made to provide reliable and accurate information, we would welcome any corrections or information provided by the writer which may not be entirely accurate, therefore for this reason, SAEMA or indeed the writer, cannot accept responsibility for any misinformation posted.

## 1. Duty Holder's Responsibilities

- 1.1** Suspended access equipment is an often overlooked but essential part of a building's services. A well-designed and maintained system is a cost-effective asset to the building it serves. It is the duty holder who is legally responsible for ensuring that SAE is:
- Safe and fit for the purpose for which it was designed
  - Properly maintained and examined.
  - Used by adequately competent and trained operatives
- 1.2** Duty holders should note that they have legally required duties and responsibilities towards the suspended access equipment and all those that use it. Those duties and responsibilities are laid down in PUWER 98, LOLER 98 and highlighted in BS 6037; ignoring these documents leaves the duty holder in peril of prosecution under health and safety legislation.

Note that a duty holder is defined in BS 6037 as a 'designated person with management responsibility for the safe use, maintenance and thorough examination of suspended access equipment'.

## 2. Regulations and Standards

- 2.1** Other information relating to this document can be found in:
- The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations
  - The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations - particularly regulation 3(1)
  - Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER98)
  - Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 (LOLER 98)
  - BS 6037-1: 2003 Code of practice for the planning, design, installation and use of permanently installed access equipment - Parts 1 and 2.
  - HSG150: Health and Safety in Construction
  - HSG33: Health & Safety in Roof work
- The Work at Height Regulations 2005

## 3. SAEMA Position

- 3.1** SAEMA recommends that all in-service activities concerning suspended access equipment use BS 6037 as a baseline since, as a code of practice, it is considered to be 'good practice'. Failure to comply with BS 6037 may result in successful prosecution in legal action.

## 4. Purpose

- 4.1** The principal aim of this document is to provide guidance to operators of suspended access equipment on how they can carry out their work in a safe, structured and orderly manner.
- 4.2** It should also help duty holders to understand better what is required of operators. Normally, operators will be window cleaners, façade maintenance personnel or members of the company employed to maintain suspended access equipment. All SAEMA members are bound to comply with this document.

## 5. Health and Safety

- 5.1** Duty holders are legally responsible to ensure that a risk assessment for the use of suspended access equipment, the access routes to it and the surroundings is carried out and any arising hazard control measures are implemented.
- 5.2** Only suitably trained persons shall use suspended access equipment.
- 5.3** All operators of suspended access equipment shall wear the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).
- 5.4** Although one person can operate some types of suspended access equipment, for safety reasons operators will frequently be in teams of at least two people. On all installations, the size of the team should be appropriate to the task to be undertaken.

## 6. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Operators shall use a full-body safety harness and shock-absorbing lanyard or inertia reel system at all times where there is a risk of falling. Other appropriate PPE may include a safety helmet, gloves, boots, luminous jackets etc.

## 7. Reporting to Site

- 7.1** Upon reporting to site, obtain the relevant equipment and/or documents as required, eg:
  - Work permits
  - Access door keys or passes
  - Equipment keys
  - Anemometer
  - Emergency procedures, etc
  - Communication Device
- 7.2** Obtain from the duty holder or a representative any further information that may affect safe use.

## 8. Communications

- 8.1** Communications can be either by voice, intercom, radio, hand signals or mobile phone. An assessment should be made at the time to decide which form of communication is the most suitable, taking various factors into consideration such as:
  - Wind carries away the sound of voices
  - Rain might damage sensitive equipment
  - Bright sunlight impairing vision of intended observers of hand signals
  - Lightning storms are particularly dangerous when using radios or mobile phones and SAE should not be operated in these conditions
  - Hospitals do not allow the use of mobile phones on the premises
  - Radio signals may be blocked due to intervening buildings
  - The MOD do not allow unauthorised radio transmissions

- The MOD might not allow the use of mobile phones
- Airside restrictions at airports

The above list is not exhaustive.

## 8.2 General communication checks:

- Intercoms, where fitted - check that the sound is clear and audible
- Two-way radios - should be in good working order, set to the same frequency and the batteries charged
- Mobile phones - check that phones have a signal and are fully charged, and that everyone concerned has a list of all the relevant telephone numbers

## 9. Pre-Use Checks

**Immediately prior to commencing using the suspended access equipment, review the risk assessment to ensure that no changes in hazards exist.** Implement all the hazard control measures specified in the working risk assessment. Where it is not possible to implement the controls, consideration must be given to abandoning using the suspended access equipment until such time as the controls can be implemented. If additional hazards are noted these should be reported and no work should be commenced.

- 9.1 The duty holder must ensure that the equipment operating manuals, and any other relevant documents are available and that these have been read and understood by all SAE users**
- 9.2 The information plates (ID plates) etc must match the suspended access equipment inventory (also known as the equipment schedule or the equipment log).** In addition, suspended platforms (cradles) should only be used with designated suspension rigs; the platform's information plate should say which suspension rigs it may be suspended from.
- 9.3 Ensure that the Load Test Certificate is current** and that there is a current LOLER report as evidence of a thorough examination. If neither of these documents is available, DO NOT use the equipment.
- 9.4 Ensure that the equipment to be used is not 'out of service'.** Any equipment that is not in service should have an 'Out of Service' notice prominently displayed on it, e.g. a Scaffold tag
- 9.5 Do not use the equipment during adverse weather conditions,** particularly high winds or electrical storms - check the weather forecast beforehand.
- 9.6 Before commencing and during work, use an anemometer** or other wind-indicating device to check the wind speed. The safe wind conditions should be in the suspended access equipment's operating manual, manufacturer's instructions or in the building manual. However, if none of those documents specify a safe wind speed, SAEMA recommends not to use the platform if the constant wind speed exceeds:

### 7 metres per second (15mph)

Even though this is a recommended MAXIMUM speed, it might be that even this speed is too high. Operators should take extra care of funnelling effects (for example, between two buildings or plant rooms) and be particularly careful near roof edges and building corners, etc where wind speeds can easily double

**9.7 Check the working areas below the platform are clear and free from obstructions**, e.g. vehicles, people, open windows and other lifting equipment.

**9.8** Men Working Overhead' signs and/or barriers may need placing below the area of works. Do not forget access to the area from side doors, alleyways etc.

**9.9 Closely inspect visually and check all the equipment to be used.** This includes the following:

- The equipment should be complete and serviceable
- The information plates (ID plates), etc must match the suspended access equipment inventory (also known as the equipment schedule or the equipment log)
- Look for signs of corrosion, damage, distress, dislodged items and overstrain, etc.
- Suspension ropes should be in good condition with no obvious signs of wear or kinking.
- If the equipment is electrically powered, check that the RCD's operate correctly
- Any power cables and their connections etc should have no obvious signs of defects.
- The runway and surrounding areas should be clear of obstructions

## 10. Rigging Platforms

**10.1** During rigging operations, where wire ropes are hauled up to or lowered down from a suspension point extra care should be taken. This is a hazardous operation, to be carried out by trained operatives only and should be risk assessed by a competent person.

Hazards to consider (list not exhaustive):

- Safe access to rigging points and hooks
- Operatives falling
- Operatives overreaching
- Dropping objects, eg hauling ropes or equipment (e.g. weights)
- Manual handling
- Weight of power cable and hauling rope
- Friction abrasion
- Cladding could cut rope (and cause damage to building)
- Swinging hook adjacent to glass
- Incorrect fitting of safety hook to anchor point.
- Crossing of main and secondary suspension wire ropes

**10.2** In the absence of any specific information the operators' manual should be used.

## 11. Safe Use of Suspended Access Equipment

- Operate the suspended access equipment as specified in the equipment operating instructions.

- Never overload the platform - a plate fixed to the platform will give the safe load (also known as Safe Working Load - SWL; or Working Loading Load - WLL; or Rated Load - RL) and the maximum number of users. If the plate does not exist, place the platform 'Out of Service' by fitting a suitable sign and inform building management. Never assume that the platform is safe to carry two people.
- Always access or exit the platform from a safe and approved place.
- Attach the hook on the safety-harness lanyard to a designated PPE attachment point in the platform, before manoeuvring the platform
- Secure all loose items, perhaps by tethering them to the platform. Even the smallest of items dropped from a height can kill.
- The platform should remain on a safe surface until movement is required. Additional personnel may need to guide the platform's initial movements
- When manoeuvring around be constantly aware of obstructions and projections from the building facade - for example, flagpoles, CCTV cameras, soil pipes, external staircases etc. Platforms can be fended off the building or around obstructions by pushing with the hands where necessary.
- Always use any facade restraints provided.
- Do not leave a platform unattended where it could be misused or cause damage. Always isolate the power supply, remove any keys and secure the equipment to prevent unauthorised use or movement by wind or weather conditions.
- Lifting apparatus should not be used from any part of the suspended access equipment unless specifically detailed in the operators' manual.
- Adequate ventilation should be available to minimise the inhalation of carbon monoxide and other noxious gases (eg: from vehicle exhausts). Don't work below street level where adequate ventilation is not available.
- Be aware of the risks associated with passing microwave antennas.

## 12. Breakdowns / Malfunctions

- 12.1** common with all mechanical and electrical equipment, breakdowns occasionally happen. As a general rule, obtain assistance by alerting building management or on-site security who should have procedures in place to deal with such situations.
- 12.2** As soon as possible after the incident, write down details of the breakdown / malfunction and ensure that both your employer and the duty holder receive a copy.

## 13. Emergencies

- 13.1** Emergency Services must be contacted if there is an immediate threat to life or limb.
- 13.2** As soon as possible after the incident, the following information under RIDDOR must be reported and ensure that your employer and the duty holder receives a copy:
- Date and time
  - Names of operators
  - Weather conditions

## 14. Completion Of Work

- On completion of the works, the suspended access equipment should be returned to its designated parking position, switched off and isolated from its power supply.
- Fit weatherproof covers, if available.
- Apply storm brakes, where fitted.
- Platforms left suspended over the sides of buildings should be adequately secured to prevent movement.
- Any damage or defect should be identified and reported to the duty holder's representative. If necessary, the equipment should be placed out of service and fitted with an appropriate '**Out Of Service**' sign.
- Remove tools, work equipment and rubbish from site.
- To reduce the possibility of infection or spread of infectious diseases, personnel should wash their hands as soon as possible after completing the works.

## 15. Signing Out Procedure

Before leaving the premises, the user should return all items listed and also confirm that they have left the site. They should complete a visit sheet and sign it; where possible the duty holder's representative should then countersign this. At least one copy should be left with the duty holder's representative for the site log.

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