Aerial Lift Safety for Utility Workers



What’s at Stake?

Aerial lifts are commonly used by utility workers. Aerial lifts include boom-supported aerial platforms, such as cherry pickers or bucket trucks, and elevating platforms, such as scissor lifts.

Aerial lifts can be dangerous pieces of machinery that require caution and alertness because there are risks from both their use and the work being carried out from them.

What’s the Danger?

Being in a raised lift while it is moving is very dangerous and a prime cause of falls and equipment tip-overs. The higher the lift, the more unstable it is, especially if it is moving.

Shock and electrocution from coming in contact with live electrical lines are also serious hazards of aerial lift work.

How to Protect Yourself

6 easy ways to stay safe in an aerial lift

1. **Stay in the lift**

    - In a boom lift, always wear a personal fall arrest system, preferably short enough to stop you falling out of/off the lift. And definitely one short enough to prevent you from hitting the ground if you fall.
    - Anchor any personal fall system to the lift, most have specific anchor points.
    - Stand on the floor of the aerial lift; do not climb or sit on the guardrails.
    - Do not use planks, ladders or other materials to extend your working position.

2. **Get low**

    - Lower the aerial lift before moving it to another work area.

- Do not exceed vertical or horizontal reach limits.
- Do not operate aerial lifts in high winds or severe weather.

3. **Working with electricity**

- If the aerial lift could contact energized lines, then at least one of the following must be done:
  - The energized lines exposed to contact must be covered with insulating protective material; or
  - The aerial lift must be insulated, and uninsulated portions of the lift must maintain the minimum approach distance from live parts.
- Utility workers must be protected by implementing all the following:
  - Each piece of equipment (trucks, trailers, etc.) must be grounded.
  - All pieces of equipment must be bonded together.
  - Ground mats must be used around the equipment.
  - Insulating protective equipment or barricades must be used to reduce the risk of conducted electricity.

4. **Avoiding electricity**

- Do not position aerial lifts between overhead hazards.
- Treat all overhead lines as if they are energized power lines, unless you know it has been de-energized, and stay at least 10 feet (3m) away (maybe more depending on voltage).
- Have power lines of known voltage de-energized if you are required to work within the prescribed safety clearance area.

5. **Stay put**

- Set outriggers on a level, solid surface, or on outrigger pads if the surface is uneven.
- Set brakes when using outriggers.
- Use wheel chocks to prevent accidental movement.
- Set up work area warnings, such as cones and signs.

6. **Lift people – not things**

- Do not use the lift as a crane to lift an object.
- Do not carry objects larger than the platform.
- Do not exceed load capacity or boom platform angle limits.

Final Word

Aerial lifts are commonly used by utility workers and are generally safer than working on ladders. However, there are still risks associated with their use, so follow these and other safe work practices outlined by your company.