

Aerial Work Platforms

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Nothing has changed the way construction workers perform their work at elevation in the past twenty years more than the proliferation of the use of aerial work platforms, a term that includes aerial, boom, and scissor lifts. This equipment, if used correctly, provides quick and safe access to work areas that at one time could only be reached from scaffolding, ladders, or a crane's manbasket. Many workers can't imagine working without them.

The most important tip to remember before operating any aerial lift platform is to always read and follow the manufacturer's safety and operation manual. OR-OSHA rules require that the manual be kept on the lift, and it can often be found in a PVC tube attached to the machine's frame or rails.

There are some questions that come up routinely about the safe and proper use of this equipment:

Am I required to have an operator's card or certification showing that I have been trained in the proper use of the equipment?

Unlike forklift operator training, OSHA rules do not require a card or certification that operators of aerial or scissor lifts have been trained. That does not mean that they do need to be trained, however. As with any equipment, only trained and authorized employees are allowed to operate them. Additionally, many general contractors do require that the operator have a card or certification confirming that they are trained, and that training should include:

1. Nature of electrical, fall, and other hazards involved in operating lifts
2. Precautions for dealing with hazards
3. Rated load capacity for the lift (including worker, tools, materials, etc.)
4. Manufacturer requirements, as outlined in operator manual
5. Demonstration of skill and knowledge in actual operation of the aerial lift

Am I required to tie off while working out of an aerial or boom lift?

Yes. This is to protect the operator from being catapulted out of the lift if it is struck by another vehicle or piece of equipment or it encounters a hole or obstruction while being moved.

Am I allowed to tie off to a structure outside of an aerial or boom lift?

No. OSHA rules specifically prohibit this practice.

Am I required to tie off while working out of a scissor lift?

No. The manufacturer provides scissor lifts with standard guardrails that afford adequate fall protection.

Am I allowed to tie off to a structure outside of a scissor lift?

OSHA rules do not specifically prohibit this. Before allowing this practice however, a qualified person would need to evaluate all potential issues/hazards, the applicable standards, the equipment provided, and the extent of employee training, and adjust any part according to the requirements of the situation.

Am I allowed to stand on the guardrails or lay a plank across the guardrails as a platform, or use a stepladder, while working out of a scissor lift?

No. Manufacturer's operating instructions require that the operator stand on the floor while working out of a scissor lift. This becomes problematic at times because overhead obstructions prevent the lift from getting into position where the work can be reached from the floor. Under these circumstances, a qualified person should make an evaluation to determine the most appropriate way to provide access to the work area.

Am I allowed to use an aerial or scissor lift to gain access to a roof, floor, or other work platform?

A worker may enter or exit an aerial lift provided that fall protection such as guardrails or a fall arrest system is used while the worker moves between the lift and the working surface. During entry to and egress from the lift, a worker may tie-off to the lift (if the lift is designed to withstand the vertical and lateral loads imposed by the employee's movement or by an arrested fall) or to an appropriate nearby structure. This means that absent an entirely guard-railed landing area, an employee would have to wear a 100 percent tie-off lanyard (two legs), tie off to the structure before exiting the lift, and then disconnect from the lift.

Other considerations while operating aerial work platforms include:

- Watch for overhead obstruction and overhead power lines
- Cover or fill in floor holes or openings with material strong enough to withstand the loads imposed on them
- Make sure the floor area around the lift is free of debris, tools, or equipment that would provide an obstruction or potential tip-over hazard
- Do not use the lift to push obstructions out of the way
- Install bumper rails on the perimeter of large floor openings to prevent the lift from driving over the edge
- Be aware that an extension cord tied to the guardrails of a lift could cause the lift to overturn if it gets caught up during movement
- Never move the lift when it is elevated above the limit the manufacturer specifies
- Determine the manufacturer's rated load capacities and do not exceed them
- Always close entry doors or chains when in the lift
- Do not use a stepladder or drywall bucket in a lift to gain additional height

Used correctly, aerial work platforms can be priceless, timesaving assets. Operate them without regard to their limitations, and this same equipment will put you and those around