

Motor vehicles and other equipment: Free rides can prove fatal

When was the last time you saw someone getting a free ride to a work station or actually working from a front-end-loader bucket? It happens all the time.

In one incident, two plumbers were being hoisted out of an excavation in an excavator bucket. As the excavator operator swung the bucket, it jerked causing one employee to fall 14 feet striking his head on the pipe in the trench. The plumber, with 22 years of experience, died.

What about a crane's headache ball, hook, or load? This method of getting to and from work stations is still so prevalent that OSHA wrote the behavior into the steel erection rule: The headache ball, hook, or load shall not be used to transport personnel except as provided in the crane regulations, i.e., using a properly constructed and used personnel basket.

Other OSHA construction rules restricting "free rides" include the following:

Forklifts

- Unauthorized personnel are not permitted to ride on forklifts. A safe place to ride must be provided where riding of forklifts is authorized.
- When riding on a platform mounted to the forks, the platform must be securely fastened and must conform to all OSHA regulations pertaining to scaffolds and scaffold guardrails. If guardrails are not provided, then personal protective equipment must be worn by employees.

Motor vehicles

- Vehicles used to transport employees must have seats firmly secured and an adequate number of seats for the number of employees to be carried.
- No employees are allowed to ride on material hoists except to inspect and maintain them. A sign on the material hoist must say: No Riders Allowed.

In many cases, there is not an OSHA rule that specifically states that you can't ride this, or you can't use that as a work station. In such cases, common sense must be applied to keep employees safe. If you allow employees to ride vehicles and equipment without the proper safeguards, eventually you will have an accident to investigate.