

Heads up on tails



Tail-lifts are useful for lorry operators moving goods in and out of their vehicles safely and securely. But the consequences of not maintaining one properly, or delaying repairs on a broken unit, can cause freight operators far more damage than a logistical headache.

Grant Williamson, a training provider who now runs Training4Taillifts (see box) says: "With hundreds of thousands of vehicles being used every day of the week, the opportunity for life-changing incidents with tail-lifts is becoming an all-too-common reality. Apart from the potentially devastating effects on the victims, this can also impact heavily on the operator's management, in terms of fines and even jail."

If you are an employer, or a self-employed person that provides lifting equipment for use at work, or if you have control of the use of lifting equipment (as a delivery driver, for example) then you are legally responsible for the tail-lift under the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations (LOLER). This requires that the lifting equipment is strong, stable and marked to indicate (maximum) safe working loads. The work being undertaken with the device must be planned, organised and performed by properly trained people. The tail-

A broken or damaged tail-lift is not good news for anyone; such faults cannot be ignored. Chris Tindall looks at how to keep on top of tail-lifts

lift itself should be subject to ongoing 'thorough examination' by a competent and impartial person.

Those inspections must take place at a frequency of no more than every six months, and it is a legal requirement that you have the current report of this examination for the tail-lift that is fitted to the vehicle.

OPEN TO INTERPRETATION

However, who is classed as a 'competent person' – never mind an 'impartial' one – is to an extent open to interpretation. That term is not defined in law, although the LOLER approved code of practice (www.is.gd/sicudu) states that it is someone with 'appropriate practical and theoretical knowledge'. As this definition is also somewhat vague, it is even more important that tail-lift users ensure that their maintenance, inspections and servicing of that equipment is frequent, rigorous and well documented.

One interpretation comes from David Byford, agent support at Palfinger distributor RPL Distribution. He asks: "What deems someone to be a competent person? At the moment, it's

a case of: 'I have been working on tail-lifts for 15 years,' and that's okay. I used to go through LOLER with engineers, and what most of them wanted was a certificate to say they were competent. But you can't do that."

This situation may be about to change, with the first training school for tail-lift operators and engineers being launched to plug an obvious gap in accredited training (see box). But in the meantime, as the code of practice says, users should feel confident that the person carrying out the examination is knowledgeable and has experience of the specific equipment being tested "as this will enable them to detect defects or weaknesses, and to assess their importance in relation to the safety and continued use of the lifting equipment".

Byford says that quite often the inspections are undertaken by an insurance company, or by a specialist tail-lift inspection firm that has been subcontracted by another company.

Or it can be done by members of staff, provided that they have sufficient experience and can be shown to be impartial and not likely to be swayed by pressure from the employer.



THOROUGH EXAMINATION

This stipulation of LOLER can also cause confusion. Byford explains its purpose: "You are trying to predict, if this part or that component fails, what will be the consequences? Anything that you [the inspector] think is safety-related is what you are checking - corrosion, damage - [while] trying to predict the consequences."

There are basically two types of truck tail-lift - column lifts or chassis mounts - and the most common failure mode of both is damage. Byford continues: "In terms of damage, are the handrails broken or bent? Are the ramps or trolley stops damaged? Check that the hydraulic unions are not leaking; the whole integrity of the kit."

He says that 75% of problems can be spotted on approach. Regular, preventative maintenance can resolve the majority of problems.

A different perspective comes from Philip Pearson, director of sales and service at Del, a brand under the Hiab name. He says: "The main cause of damage is infrequent or insufficient driver and operator training. This is in part caused by a shortage of experienced drivers, and an increasing demand for delivery vehicles to satisfy consumer expectations for immediate delivery."

Pearson says that no matter what type of truck tail-lift you operate, it will require servicing three or four times per year, depending on usage. However, he adds, each different category has its own specific needs, driven by the technology and components used. And all of this is in addition to daily and weekly checks as prescribed in the manufacturer's operator and maintenance manual.

In addition, other regulations also cover tail-lifts, including the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations (PUWER) as well as the Machinery Directive. That means that "it is crucial for employers to assess the risks of the use of tail-lifts fitted to their vehicles, taking into account the expected use," according to an HSE spokeswoman.

Users cannot expect to prevent the occurrence of every accident, but they can mitigate their effects, as well as demonstrate that everything has been done to ensure the equipment was safe and in good working order. **TE**

FURTHER INFORMATION

SOE operations best practice guide - www.is.gd/zecesa

SOE guide to preventing falls - www.is.gd/obezal

SOE summary of regulations - www.is.gd/ozekiy



BACK TO SCHOOL

A training course specifically designed for tail-lift technicians and engineers has been set up to provide a recognised standard of competence for inspections, maintenance and repairs. Developed by the Motus Vehicle Solutions team and headed up by business development manager Grant Williamson, the first courses run by Training4Taillifts will be rolled out this September.

He says: "When you consider the intense effort and scrutiny that goes into general vehicle maintenance and operational compliance, it was astonishing that tail-lifts - such an integral part of so many trucks, trailers, ambulances and other vehicles on road and rail - had no requirement for engineers to have any accredited training or provable levels of competence for inspection and maintenance."

The EAL Level 3 Award in Vehicle Tail-lift Inspection and Maintenance is described as a competency course that supports overall compliance and provides engineers with what they have been demanding for a long time: recognition and credibility in the tail-lift industry.

The six-day course, spread over three months, gives engineers hands-on training on all of the manufacturers' products, as well as experience in completing thorough examinations, weight testing and fault finding. On completion of the course assessment they will receive the Level 3 qualification, which should give operators and employers the confidence to know their kit has been inspected by a competent person.

"I want to make sure the industry is safe for people and the end user knows that the lifting equipment is being maintained correctly," Williamson concludes.