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HOW STUDENTS LEARN TO OPERATE AN ELEVATED WORK PLATFORM: THE PRACTICE OF 'TRYING OUT' CONTROLS

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Abstract

Working at heights is recognised as high risk work. The dangers of working at heights have been mitigated with the introduction of the elevated-work platform (EWP). However, use of EWPs has resulted in new dangers including overturning, entrapment, and collision. The layout of basket control panels vary significantly among EWP types and models and several variations can often be found in use across the same construction site. EWP operators have indicated the requirement to transition across multiple control panels is problematic. To gain a better understanding of how operators learn to use a new set of controls, this paper examined the initial course operators undertake to gain a licence to operate a boom-type EWP. Video data gained over the three-day program was analysed to elucidate how the trainees identified, selected and tested controls. Results indicate a heavy reliance on unsafe practices such as 'trying out' a control when its function is not known and 'learning from mistakes' in order to learn what a control does.

Keywords: Continuing Education, Engineering, Elevated Work Platform, Control Selection, Control Use.