



Safe as houses

Do you know how safety regulations apply to the tool hire business? **Louise Hosking**, Chartered Health & Safety Practitioner at Hosking Associates, explains the rules.

Suppliers of hired tools and their customers using them for work must comply with the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998. There are additional requirements under other legislation for lifting equipment and pressure vessels, and personal protective equipment (PPE) has its own set of requirements.

At the heart of all these requirements is the idea that people or companies who own, operate or have control over work equipment must ensure it is safe, and can be used safely.

The definition of work equipment is far reaching, and can include any hand-held, mobile or fixed machinery, appliance, apparatus, tool or installation. So what should you consider?

1. Firstly, always use the right tool for the job. If the correct equipment is chosen for the task, it will also be the safest. A reputable hire company will be able to provide customers with good advice to ensure the safest choices are made.

2. Equipment must be well maintained and inspected. Good tool hire companies will hold records on checks and maintenance of work equipment. Some equipment will come with a maintenance log. Lifting equipment must have a statutory examination every six months if it can be used to lift people, and every 12 months otherwise. Use a tool hire company which can provide documentation showing how equipment has been maintained and inspected. Customers also have a duty to ensure equipment is being checked and maintained once it is in their control.

3. Anyone using equipment for work must have the skills, knowledge and experience to do so. Most commercial customers will expect to prove they have the correct qualifications before they can

hire some equipment, and many larger hire companies can offer courses to gain the required credentials. However, once in use it is down to the customer to check the equipment is safe to use, and to report back to the hirer if a problem is identified.

4. Companies are responsible for ensuring their workers are supervised when using tools.

5. The tool hire company is responsible for ensuring supplied equipment has the correct safety devices in the right places, which must be fully functioning and intact.



6. When issuing equipment, it should have the correct warning notices in the right places.

7. Ride-on equipment must be provided with roll-over protection measures, all around visibility must be good, brakes adequate and lights provided if necessary.

Both the tool hire company and the customer clearly have responsibilities. The customer hiring equipment for work must ensure all use is fully risk assessed. The risk assessment will cover the points raised above, but also consider the

precise nature of the task to be undertaken, the environment, and how others could be affected by the work.

Domestic users are those who hire equipment for personal use as opposed to for a business activity. They are not at work, so do not have the responsibilities of an employee, an employer or a self-employed person. They do not have to undertake risk assessments prior to using potentially dangerous equipment, and there is no-one to supervise how it is used.

Responsible tool hiring companies should risk-assess their approach to the

supply of safe, maintained equipment free from defects, and their approach to providing safety information and English instructions, and should ensure equipment should only be available to hire if it has been CE marked.

More help and advice, and information on health, safety and environment training courses, is available from Hosking Associates, and there are approved codes of practice available for free download from www.hse.gov.uk.

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