

Project Location: UK

Brief description of Incident

An electrician was working from a podium step to fix a ceiling mounted conduit. Shortly after ascending the podium his work mate, who was in the same room, heard a shout and turned to see the podium step overturning and his colleague falling with it.

The podium fell to the floor, but as the electrician fell to the floor he also struck his forehead against a wall just above floor height.



The electrician partially lost consciousness from the blow to his head and appeared very confused. The site team called an ambulance and at hospital the electrician was diagnosed with a compression injury, necessitating a stay in hospital of five days for observation.

Considering the distance that the electrician fell, and his own momentum from the fall, it is surprising and fortunate that he did not sustain a fractured skull or possibly worse.

Investigation

The room within which the electrician was working had an existing timber floor, which was in good condition, without holes or openings and was also level. Although there were some materials stored within the room, they did not affect the use of the podium. The location where the podium step was being used was directly beneath the conduit being fixed, so overreaching was not necessary.

On examining the podium several issues were identified. None of the four wheel locks had been engaged; the guardrail had not been raised to suit the (adjustable) platform height of 1.25m; a diagonal brace (normally attached between the two side frames) had not been fitted, it remained in its stowed position. The podium was also in a generally poor condition, with some parts not moving easily, and other parts clearly misaligned/bent.

Although the plant hire company had provided instructions with the podium, these remained sealed within a wallet attached to the podium. The M&E contractor had not provided any form of instruction to their operatives on the assembly and use of this type of podium.

Without the diagonal brace in position, the podium is prone to leaning or 'sagging' to one or another side by approximately 50mm. Whilst this tendency alone will not make the podium overturn, combined with the poor maintenance and the unlocked wheels these factors definitely contributed to the overturning.



What most probably happened at the time of the accident is that the podium leaned to one side, probably due to the electrician moving to one side of the platform. As his weight was thrown further over the side of the podium by the unexpected movement, his momentum together with the wheels being unlocked caused his weight to move outside the balance point of the podium causing it to overturn.

Lesson Learned:

The electrician was not familiar with the particular type of podium that he was given to use. Although he had not assembled the podium himself, had he been given instruction on it's assembly and use, it is more likely that he would have known that the diagonal brace was still in it's stowed position.

Podium steps have been developed and marketed over a relatively short period of time, with several different types now available and in regular use. This makes it very important that users are instructed in their use – for each type that they're expected to use. Had this happened in this instance this accident would likely not have occurred.

Action

Whenever a contractor brings podium steps to site, a tool box talk on their assembly and use must be carried out, for each type in use. This tool box talk must also be recorded.

As podium steps are still relatively new pieces of equipment, and also to avoid a repeat of this accident, it is also important that site managers are familiar with the types of podium in use on their projects.

Conclusion

The following is general advice applicable to podium use:

- Users instructed in assembly and use
- All podium components fitted
- Outriggers extended (If fitted)
- Platform gates closed and locked (these sometimes contribute to stability)
- Wheel locks engaged
- Podium positioned to avoid overreaching
- Guardrails adjusted to suit platform height
- Podiums inspected regularly