

SAFE, SAFER, SAFEST

There is always risk involved in working at heights. Introduction of aerial work platforms has made it easy for workers perform well without any risk of falling, leading to timely completion of the work with higher productivity.

Human safety is of prime importance while working at heights. Aerial work platforms (AWPs) in various configurations and operational specifications are the best solution to overcome the challenges, without compromising on safety. AWPs can make a difference in a company's day-to-day operation. There is a broad spectrum of models with a variety of lift heights suitable for almost any work requirement. When choosing an aerial lift, some aspects to consider are indoor vs outdoor applications, vertical and horizontal reach of platform and lifting capacities.

Importance of AWPs

AWPs or Mobile Elevated Work Platforms (MEWPs) are self-propelled people lifting equipment which are used anywhere when someone is required to work safely at heights. Haulotte is a full range manufacturer of AWPs of different variants specific to different applications at any project site to work at heights from 6 m to 43 m. **Souma Ray, Director, Haulotte India** says, "The conventional method of accessing heights by ladders, manual scaffolding, etc are not only unsafe, but also greatly affects productivity. Use of AWPs make the work both safe as well as productive and the project timelines can easily be met. In AWP, there is nothing called set-up time as it is ready to work so long as the batteries are charged in a electric machine, while diesel is available in a diesel-operated machine. In conventional methods, there is of course a major set up and dismantling time involved. Besides, the AWPs



Photo courtesy: Haulotte India

Use of AWPs make the work both safe as well as productive.

being self-propelled, can be moved to different locations in a work site in the shortest possible time."

The use of access equipment is universal and not specific to any particular sector. Wherever there is a need to work safely at heights, access equipment is required. Be it hotels, malls, hospitals, warehouses, manufacturing industry, facility management, construction, mining, etc, all across, access equipment are required.

Pradeep Agarwal, Managing Director, Mtandt Group, elaborates on the advantages of AWPs, "Made for the purpose of lifting workers, tools and light materials, AWPs can move easily on the work site and provide safer access in hard-to-reach areas. The design of these lifts allow operator mobility and flexibility, which increases

efficiency. It also replaces the use of traditional ladders, man-baskets on lift trucks and scaffolds to make working at high elevations safer. Industries such as manufacturing plants, maintenance service providers, real estate management companies, warehouse and construction companies all utilise AWPs. Besides general construction, you will see aerial lifts being used to handle routine building maintenance, painting, trimming trees, installing rooftop HVAC services and inventory management."

Praveen Sharma, Managing Director, ABC Infra Equipment, comments, "Speed with safety is the biggest advantage of using AWPs. Using conventional methods of access can not only comprise on safety of the workers but can also unnecessarily delay the project."

Photo courtesy: Haulotte India



Using AWP will boost the confidence of the worker on his safety.

Safety first

The concept of AWP itself is safe working at height. Using an AWP will boost the confidence of the worker on his safety which leads to productivity. However, using AWP is not common



Photo courtesy: Mearid Group

AWPs enhance safety, productivity and convenience at customer's work place.

in India as the people think it is a burden on them. Ray comments, "It is sad that although India is the most prominent emerging economy in the world today, there is a severe lacuna in concern towards safety. The general thought is that investment towards safety is an unnecessary burden whilst it actually enhances the productivity besides ensuring safety of the workmen at heights. The awareness and inculcation of the best practices of safety needs to get imbibed in each one of us. It is very essential that the government makes strict legislation on safety especially when working at heights. The number of fatal accidents which keep on happening due to use of conventional practices of working at heights followed in India needs to be stopped. We hope that the government would come up with stringent regulations and this will certainly help in propagating the need of safety while working at heights."

Agarwal is of the view that AWP are an industry favorite since they enhance safety, productivity and convenience at customer's work place. He says, "Customers take safety quite seriously as norms are getting stringent day-by-day and even a small



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mishap could have big implication over the entire project. Without saying it goes, customer looks for equipment which can save considerable amount time and easy to use."

Sharma says, "Over the years, customers have become increasingly safety-conscious. What used to be OK in the past is not OK these days. Many sites have a mandatory requirement for use of AWP over and above a particular height. For such customers, safety always comes first and cost is really not a deterrent. Even smaller contractors, who were earlier reluctant to use AWP due to high cost are now started using them owing to the advantages mentioned above."

Cost factor

Small and medium players are still keep distance from investing in AWP considering the cost involved. Only big corporate companies are using these machines as primary need for their daily functions. Says Ray, "Certainly, price is a crucial factor for any buyer, however the customer needs to decide whether he wants a quality renowned product at an acceptable price point or simply because of lower price he/she shall consider cheaper less reliable makes. After all we cannot assign monetary value when it comes to safety. Any wrong choice of an unreliable product just on basis of



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Managing Director, ABC Infra Equipment

cheaper price can result in unwanted danger and fatality.”

However Agarwal is of the view, “Cost is not the only parameter customer considers while buying any capital equipment. It is a complex buying process and many factors are considered by an informed customer like time, safety, productivity and convenience. A cheaper looking solution may take huge time and manpower for installing, dismantling and transportation, above all may not be the safest option available. A wise buyer will consider the overall cost saving, time saving and safety over the project lifecycle and chooses the option, which satisfies all the parameters. No buyer will want to buy an option which is not safer to use as this may jeopardise the entire project.”

Challenges

According to Ray, the AWP industry in India is still at a very nascent stage. He observes, “Although awareness is increasing, there’s a lot to be done to make AWP’s an integral requirement across sectors. Furthermore, the lack of legislation in the country for working at heights and non-restricted import of old cheap access equipment from developed countries becomes further deterrents

which impede the growth of AWP industry in India.”

Agarwal observes, “India is a labour-intensive market where labour is available at affordable rates. No proper guidelines are in place for workman safety and varied regulatory issues exist in different states. Also, availability of trained manpower who qualifies to work at height is very less. The driving force and implementation of safety norms pertaining to the use of used equipment is still not upgraded by the government. Availability of used equipment and lack of proper safety regulations make them unsafe to use at work space.”

Sharma sees challenges in transportation of the equipment. “India being a geographically vast market, it is quite challenging to move the machines from one part of the country to the other. Also, with the introduction of the e-way bill system, the industry is in a state of confusion since there are a lot of grey areas where clarification is required.”

Market scenario

Even though the use of AWP’s is still at nascent stage, there are opportunities in future for the use of AWP’s in big numbers. Ray points out, “With the increase in awareness and



Photo courtesy: ABC Infra Equipment

Contractors have now realised the importance of using AWP’s for working at heights.

Photo courtesy: Mtamdt Group



“CUSTOMER LOOKS FOR EQUIPMENT WHICH CAN SAVE CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT TIME AND IS EASY TO USE.”

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Managing Director, Mtamdt Group

Rentals can play a major role in meeting the requirements of AWPs cost-effectively.

availability, the AWPs are certainly becoming a constant requirement at all project sites. Such requirements get fulfilled by direct procurement or by renting in machines from AWP rental companies. The established core AWP rental companies have a fleet of machines which are a mix of younger and older machines. They have operations and maintenance team who maintain these machines.” However, he raise alarm on certain unprofessional practices in the rental industry. “There is severe under cutting of rates being done by some new small entrants in the AWP rental segment, who procure very old and out of serviceable life machines and give at very cheap rates. It is dangerous to consider such machines just because they come at cheap rates. Perhaps the mindset of the procurement managers need change because its both safety as well as productivity which is correlated here. They should insist on accepting only younger machines, which shall only lead towards growth and betterment of the AWP industry.”

Sharma says, “AWPs are now being considered as an important piece of machinery for a project site. Earlier, contractors used to utilise AWPs just because their clients insisted them to do so. However, the contractors have realised the benefits of using AWPs

and are now embracing safe work practices by use of AWPs.”

Rental market

With many customers are of the view that investment on AWP is an extra cost, rentals can play a major role in meeting customer requirements with minimum cost burden. Agarwal lists out the advantages of renting out a machine:

- Cost benefit is a key factor – renting equipment instead of owning removes a sizeable burden from a contractor’s asset register.
- The significant price inflation in recent years associated with buying new machinery, when new engine regulations have pushed equipment prices higher, makes the prospect of renting even more attractive.
- Renting gives contractors access to the most modern, safe and environmentally friendly equipment without the capital outlay. And as far as the rental companies are concerned, having the most up-to-date, reliable equipment on offer is of key strategic importance, and they spend a lot of money to make sure their fleet is in the best condition for rental.
- Renting equipment means that contractors not only have

on-demand access to the most advanced machines on the market, but they also avoid the cost and efficiency pitfalls of in-house servicing and maintenance.

Ray comments, “AWP rental industry has been experiencing a big jump in demand of equipment which is an encouraging sign. Many new players are emerging in the rental market.”

Growth drivers

Ray points out, “We at Haulotte always believe in the principle of ‘Customer Proximity’. That is the reason even for a nascent market like India is today for AWP industry, we have foreseen the potential that this country has, and decided to base ourselves in India as an Indian registered company. The local presence acts as a major catalyst in customers’ minds and thus builds customer confidence on us as an organisation and our products. The key growth driver in a competitive market is being there where the requirements are, being able to respond to the needs of your customer at the shortest possible time and most importantly position your products in terms of specifications and price points that customers find lucrative.”

He further adds, “Coupled with increasing the awareness on the

Photo courtesy: ABC Infra Equipment



The demand for AWPs is currently driven by auto, oil & gas, cement, steel, infrastructure and wind sectors.

multifarious use of AWPs, the two most important factors that shall propel the expansion of the AWP market would be a clear legislation from the government specifically to safe working at heights and a restriction related to the age of used machines being imported into the country.”

According to Agarwal, the market expects to grow exponentially in the coming years as there are many projects lined up in the awarding stage. Also, increase in safety demands and limited availability of skilled labours give spurt to the powered access platforms and other AWPs. Compared to the US, Europe and other developed countries like Japan and Singapore, the Indian AWP market is still in the process of maturing in terms of knowledge, use and the importance of the equipment. Even there is wide disparity between man-machine ratio as compared to USA and Europe in India. We believe major drivers for AWP market growth in India is due to exponential growth in infrastructure segment and increase in demand for safe working practices expect to take the AWP market to new heights.”

Sharma states, “Upcoming industrial expansion and infrastructure projects are the major growth drivers. The demand for AWPs

is currently driven by auto, oil & gas, cement, steel, infrastructure and wind sectors. Mandatory use of AWP for any work at height above 8 m is the way forward to grow for this industry.”

Policy initiatives needed

Currently, there is no policy initiatives on mandatory use of AWPs for working at heights. Ray comments, “Unfortunately, till date there are no policies on safe working at heights, which is proving to be an impediment in the growth on

the AWP industry in India. If like in developed countries, use of AWPs are made mandatory to work at heights, then we will see an exponential growth of this industry. For example in USA, Europe and Australia, it is mandatory to use an access platform when working at a height over 2 m. In the interest of better safety when working at heights, it is important that in India our government takes a cue of the best practices followed across the developed economies and formulate regulations which shall encourage usage of AWPs.”

He also takes a dig at the uncontrolled use of very old used machines. “In India, there are no restrictions in importing used machines of any age and condition. There are a lot of old used machines that have completed their serviceable age, finding its way into the Indian market at very cheap cost. These used machines are generally imported and used by the rental companies. I do agree to the fact that used machines are required so as to run a viable rental business, but then such used machines should be younger in age and in good working condition. Reputed rental companies who have a mix of fairly younger used machines alongside new machines are finding it hard to sustain at lower rental rate,

which is being perpetuated by new entrants in the rental segment offering very old used machines.”

He further adds, “In comparison, a new machine is state-of-the-art and as per the latest technological innovations. They also have the advanced safety features that have been introduced with time. All manufacturers strive to make technological up-gradation in their machines so as to ensure better safety. The users who rent in such machines have a major role to play by stipulating that they would not allow deployment of a very old used machine. Some regular reputed end-users stipulate that such used machines should not be over 2-5 years old, which is a good sign.”

According to Agarwal, Indian customers are gradually becoming safety conscious and nowadays, many companies have a separate safety department headed by a safety officer. “We, being experts in safety and work at height, provide training to the customers and introduce them to the latest safety practices and products used internationally. This initiative of Mtandit is welcomed in the industry and now many corporate clients even want their suppliers/contractors to be trained by us.”

According to Sharma, some of the leading manufacturers are in touch with National Safety Council in order to have some legislation regarding mandatory use of AWPs.

Infrastructure development has picked up over the last few years and a lot of technologically advanced equipment have been employed in various projects. However, the concept of AWPs is yet to pick up considering its importance in the current scenario. The reason for its slow growth can be attributed mainly to the absence of a legislation for using AWPs working at heights. Also, there is a need of increased awareness of advantages of using such machines.

- SUDHEER VATHIYATH