

Real Consequences

Why MEWP Safety Can't Be Optional!



When EWP incidents occur, investigations often focus on the operator in the basket. In reality, the most influential decisions are usually made much earlier – by leaders, planners, and those responsible for training and capability across the organisation.

Introduction:

In early 2025, WorkSafe New Zealand issued a public reminder following a [fatal scissor lift incident](#). The message was clear: Mobile Elevating Work Platforms (MEWP) remain a high-risk activity when planning, training, and supervision fall short.

That reminder matters – but for organisations working at height every day, it doesn't go far enough.

Because the real question most PCBUs are asking isn't "What does WorkSafe expect?"

It's "What does good actually look like on a live worksite?"

That's where this white paper comes in.

Thoughtful Training Changes Behaviour, Not Just Knowledge

From a Safety 'n Action perspective, EWP safety is not primarily a question of rules or reminders. It is a question of how well people have been prepared to make decisions in real conditions.

This is where thoughtful training becomes the critical differentiator.

There is a significant difference between training that explains what an EWP is, and training that prepares someone to use one safely when conditions are imperfect.

Operators rarely get hurt because they don't know the basic controls. They get hurt because:

- the task evolved,
- the environment changed,
- time pressure increased,
- or the machine was not appropriate for the tasks

Thoughtful training acknowledges this reality. It goes beyond instruction and focuses on judgement – helping operators recognise early warning signs, understand how machines respond under load, and know when stopping work is the safest decision.

This kind of training builds confidence without encouraging complacency. It reinforces that working at height always carries risk, even on familiar equipment and short-duration tasks.

The Leadership Effect on EWP Safety

Leadership sets the tone for how EWPs are used long before anyone steps onto the platform.

Where leaders treat EWP training as a one-off requirement, safety performance tends to plateau. Skills fade, shortcuts emerge, and risk tolerance increases quietly over time.

By contrast, organisations that invest in ongoing, practical training send a different message. They make it clear that:

- competence must be maintained, not assumed,
- safety decisions are supported, even when inconvenient,
- and experience should sharpen judgement, not dull it.

Supervisors and managers play a particularly important role here. When they understand the limitations of EWPs themselves, they are better equipped to plan work realistically, challenge unsafe setups, and intervene early when conditions change.

Why Practical, Hands-On Training Matters

EWPs are dynamic machines. Their behaviour changes depending on terrain, load, height, reach, and environmental factors. These nuances cannot be fully understood in a classroom alone.

Hands-on training allows operators to experience:

- how stability feels before it becomes unsafe,
- how different platforms behave under similar tasks,
- how small decisions can significantly affect risk.

This experiential learning is what turns procedures into instinct. It is also what gives operators the confidence to say "this isn't right" before an incident occurs.

The Safety 'n Action Approach

Safety 'n Action delivers [MEWP training](#) as a short, practical course focused on building real operating capability – not just awareness. Training is designed to prepare operators to safely plan, operate, and shut down MEWPs in real workplace conditions, using the types of equipment commonly found on New Zealand worksites.

The programme develops a clear understanding of different MEWP types, including scissor lifts, boom lifts, and vertical personnel platforms, and when each is appropriate for the task. Emphasis is placed on understanding equipment limitations, including stability, load capacity, reach, ground conditions, and environmental influences such as wind and surrounding activity.

Training is delivered through practical scenarios using real equipment, allowing learners to experience how MEWPs behave under varying conditions and to recognise early warning signs before risk escalates. Safety features, emergency systems, and controls are explored in context, with a focus on how operators should respond when conditions change.

Legislative requirements are addressed pragmatically, linking New Zealand codes of practice and WorkSafe guidance directly to day-to-day decision-making rather than compliance in isolation. Learners are also trained to assess worksites, identify hazards, respond to faults or damage, and carry out safe shutdown and post-use procedures.

The Outcome

By the end of the course, learners are equipped to think critically about the task, the equipment, and the environment, and to make safer decisions at every stage of MEWP use.

Delivered as short-course training at Safety 'n Action's purpose-fitted training centres nationwide, using hands-on, scenario-based learning on real equipment, the programme builds confidence, competence, and safer outcomes on site.

In Summary

Safe EWP use is not achieved through reminders alone. It is built through leadership decisions that prioritise thoughtful training, reinforce competence over time, and recognise that working at height demands constant attention.

When organisations invest in practical, hands-on training delivered by people who understand how EWPs are used in the real world, safety performance improves – not because people are told to be careful, but because they are equipped to be.

That is where Safety 'n Action adds value: translating expectations into capability, and training into safer outcomes.

