



August 6 — Never Assume the Operator Sees You

I was driving a manlift near the load station, and while I was in the air turning the manlift around without any warning the train was moving down the tracks. There was no alarm sounding and no spotter on the ground checking the area. So, as I let off the control to start reversing the lift it went in limp mode. I was stuck in the air unable to move the lift either way, and the rail car was steadily moving towards me. The rail car stopped within just a few feet of the lift. After a few more minutes I got the lift to finally move and I got out and parked it. went to my truck because I was well shaken over the situation.

At the time of the observation, no immediate corrective action had been taken, my supervisor said the gentleman he spoke to said they had previous knowledge that the alarm that should have sounded had a short in it and the just hadn't gotten around to fixing it, but that they would come and get a written statement from me so they could take corrective actions. No one that day or the next day ever came to check on me or take a statement. nothing to my knowledge was ever done about it.

Moving equipment and poor communication... ...are a dangerous combination.

While operating a manlift near the load station, an employee was repositioning the lift when a rail car unexpectedly began moving toward the work area. There was no audible warning and no spotter ensuring the travel path was clear. As the operator attempted to move away, the manlift unexpectedly went into limp mode, leaving him suspended in the air with no ability to move. The rail car continued approaching and stopped only a few feet away.

This close call wasn't caused by one mistake—it was the result of several failed safeguards happening at the same time. The operator had no warning that the rail equipment was moving, there was no one monitoring the travel path, and when the equipment malfunctioned, there was no immediate way to remove the operator from danger. Fortunately, the rail car stopped before contact occurred. The outcome could easily have been much different.

Whenever mobile equipment, rail traffic, and personnel share the same work area, communication becomes just as important as the equipment itself. Operators should never assume they have been seen, and equipment operators should never assume the path ahead is clear without verification. Clear communication, functioning warning systems, and designated spotters create the layers of protection that keep everyone safe when the unexpected happens.

Hazards

- Moving rail equipment
- Working near mobile equipment
- Equipment malfunction
- Blind spots and limited visibility
- Lack of communication between operators
- Missing warning alarms or spotters

Words of Wisdom

When heavy equipment is moving, communication isn't a convenience—it's a critical safety control. Never assume someone sees you or knows where you are.

Pause and Think

- How do you know equipment operators are aware of your location before they begin moving?
- What should you do if required warning systems or alarms are not functioning?
- When is a spotter necessary, and what responsibilities should that person have?
- If your equipment unexpectedly fails, what is your plan for getting to a safe location?
- What communication practices can our crew improve today when working around moving equipment?

Closing Thought

Near misses rarely happen because of one failure—they happen when several small failures line up. Strong communication and constant awareness keep those failures from becoming serious incidents.

See Something • Say Something • Do Something