

## Readers

## Letters

The letter in our October issue from John Wood and Barry Ireland regarding IPAF certainly caused a good deal of reaction.

We received a large number of calls and emails all taking a different view to those expressed in the letter. We publish below a response from IPAF along with one of the more passionate notes from a member. Both reflect the feedback we received. We also received a further letter from Messrs Ireland and Wood repeating their concerns and saying that they had received a good deal of support from other "independents" who felt the same way.

To date we have not seen that in letters, calls or emails to the Vertical Press.

Dear Sir,

IPAF is delighted to be congratulated on its "successful efforts to raise safety awareness" (J C Wood and Barry Ireland - Letters, Cranes & Access, October 2006). However, just one or two of the many inaccuracies and misconceptions in the rest of their letter really cannot be allowed to pass without comment.

IPAF is not a quango. It is not funded by government and is entirely independent of it. We are also entirely independent of CITB with which we have no formal ties. Ours is a not-for-profit membership organisation open to everyone involved with powered access and its views and actions reflect those of its members.

Contrary to the suggestion in the letter, IPAF and its members are particularly proud that its PAL Card is a voluntary industry initiative. The training programme was established in response to the pointed comment made by the HSE in 1992: "If some respectable organisation doesn't do it [set up a national, certificated operator training scheme] soon, government legislation will force the pace and that would be in no-one's interest."

Of course IPAF's training programme had a head start. The combined expertise and experience of its members helped greatly in its development and delivery to consistently high standards. Equally importantly, it naturally had the support of these members who collectively, today, manufacture 90% of, and purchase 70%, of all the platforms sold in the UK.

It really is no fault of IPAF, nor indeed of the HSE, if there are those who mistakenly believe that IPAF's PAL Card is a mandatory requirement to operate powered access equipment. The HSE has made it perfectly clear on several occasions that this is not the case. What it has made even clearer is that operators must be properly trained to use such equipment. Inevitably, people are drawn to the clear market leader. Over 230 training centres across 17 countries currently

train in excess of 50,000 operators every year on the IPAF programme. In total, over a quarter of a million have been trained. Incidentally, many of these centres also offer and promote other training alongside the IPAF programme. But I am convinced that the IPAF training programme has been instrumental in keeping accidents to a minimum.

Finally, I would point out that IPAF is much more than a training programme, we are also actively involved in lobbying European and American standards makers (eg to prevent the banning of sliding mid rails), offering preferential insurance rates, encouraging the training of apprentices, lobbying government for sensible regulations (eg the retention of exempt vehicle status etc) and campaigning for the correct use of harnesses. These are areas where responsible members of the industry get together and speak with a united voice.

If Messrs Wood and Ireland really believe that so many of their colleagues have got it wrong, then they should join the Federation and change it. After all, any trade association is only as good as its members - ours are exceptionally good and willing to give up weekends and evenings to develop policies that are in the common interest of the industry and which help save lives.

Yours faithfully

Tim Whiteman, Managing Director

International Powered Access Federation

Dear Sir

I was quite astonished today when I read the readers letters section of C&A, and in particular the letter from J Woods and Barry Ireland.

I had actually read the letter next to it when I received my copy earlier in the month, but some how managed to miss this. Someone asked me my opinion at a dinner on Friday night and I had to plead ignorant. I picked up a copy today to educate myself and could not believe my eyes.

It is a very brave move to speaking out so publicly, I can only assume that these chaps feel very strongly about their particular viewpoint, and must have courage in their conviction.

If a neutral where to read the letter printed, they would maybe form a particular opinion of IPAF and what IPAF do. In a way I can partially see some thing in their argument, although I don't quite understand why! My personal opinion of IPAF is something quite different. It is an organisation that does not take for granted the position it has worked so hard to achieve, and I believe still has a long way to go. The Powered Access industry in the grand scheme of things is a tiny little world. It is hard enough to get the PAL card recognised, let alone 30 or 40 other cards. Unlike these chaps I can't afford the time, money or the will to write a course from scratch, pay to have it independently verified. Then pay astronomical insurer premiums for my instructors, and myself just in case we have to defend ourselves, our actions and our methods in a court of law. I could go on and on...

I cannot believe that these companies have ever made representations directly to the IPAF council, with any question relating to the Federation. Then I ask myself who is IPAF that is turning into a monster?

.... Well it is paid up members like me, who are growing in number each day, is that why IPAF's voice is getting stronger, because it is a unified voice???

These chaps question the fact that they are in the minority, and say "we cannot believe that our views are ours, and ours only". I must ask have you had many letters in support of their 'plight'?

Confused and exasperated....

Regards Andrew McCusker, Active Rental

Dear Sir,

Banning ladders is not managing risk. I believe that British industry, and in particular the construction industry, stands accused of imposing draconian blanket bans rather than managing the risk of working at height.

Rather than training the workforce to assess the risks and select the most appropriate piece of equipment in the true spirit of the regulations, ladders and stepladders are being banned industry-wide, despite the regulations making specific provision for their continued use.

The Work at Height Regulations 2005 do not ban ladders, they clearly state that ladders may be used when the task is of low risk and short duration. The HSE accepts the practicalities of the use of ladders and the fact that they are tried and tested in a wide variety of situations across virtually all industry sectors. Indeed, there are instances where the use of ladders or stepladders, because of their portability, simplicity and ease of use, are the best and most practical work at height method.

With more than two million ladders in daily use, British industry needs to be thinking less about outlawing ladders and more about education and training. Then, when ladders are being used, they can be used safely, sensibly and in accordance with best practice - which is exactly what the regulations demand.

Why use a more elaborate, time-consuming and inevitably more expensive option when a properly maintained ladder, used correctly by a professionally trained operative, can often perform the task in a fraction of the time?"

What people need to realise is that, apart from the cost implications, there are many situations where the selection of more elaborate work at height equipment can actually lead to an increased exposure to risk for users and bystanders - where the equipment needs to be assembled and dismantled, or where there is moving machinery and working areas need to be cleared and exclusion zones established and managed."

For its part, the BLMA, the organisation at the forefront of advancing safety and standards

in the UK, is putting its money where its mouth is by providing a nationally accredited training scheme for users, supervisors and managers.

Unlike other training schemes which are often based on outdated practice, it is fast becoming the industry standard." Because this is training developed by ladder experts - people who know and understand the industry and speak the language - we fully expect the BLMA PhotoCard will quickly become the only proof of training accepted on site.

As a further aid to best practice we have also produced a 40-page Users Guide full of valuable, practical information on the safe use of ladders and stepladders.

No-one can say that the BLMA is not playing its part in helping to plan work properly, assess the risks and make sure that people are competent - and safe. It would be good to see British industry doing the same.

Yours faithfully

**David Walker**

Immediate Past President

British Ladder Manufacturers' Association

Dear Sir

Can I make representation on behalf of all the recipients of the David Smith email. It is an unfortunate circumstance that this problem has occurred and everyone accepts that there was no will or intent. However the constant stream of emails that use the address list, are intended and are very annoying. This is only adding to the problem. Some of these 'spammers' have sent me dozens of emails, Kailey Simpson being one example, Nigel Lewis another plus, many more.

I have made a conscious decision that even if I needed the work of any of these organisations I would not use them now anyway.

I have been loathe to write this email, as it adds to the problem, but I am fed up with the barrage of unnecessary clutter arriving in my Inbox. I have sent the email with a hidden address list but I do apologise for this email.

If the offending suppliers do not intend to stop this nonsense then would you at least remove my name from your address list.

Thank you.

**Captain P. J. McNamara** Harbour Master Great Yarmouth Port Authority

*(The CPA sent out an update bulletin in November that when it hit one or more members servers repeated itself over and over again to the full mailing list. Some members received it over a thousand times and were forced to temporarily shut their email systems down. As if that was not bad enough, a few people receiving the emails thought it would be a great idea to use the mailing list to promote their wares. The problem was that their spam - emails also repeated themselves over and over again, blocking up recipients inboxes. The whole affair cost a number of members some serious£££)*

#### Letters to the editor

Please send letters to the editor:

Cranes&Access: Po Box 6998, Brackley NN13 5WY, UK. We reserve the right to edit letters for length.

We also point out that letters are the personal views of our readers and not necessarily the views of the Vertical Press Ltd or its staff.