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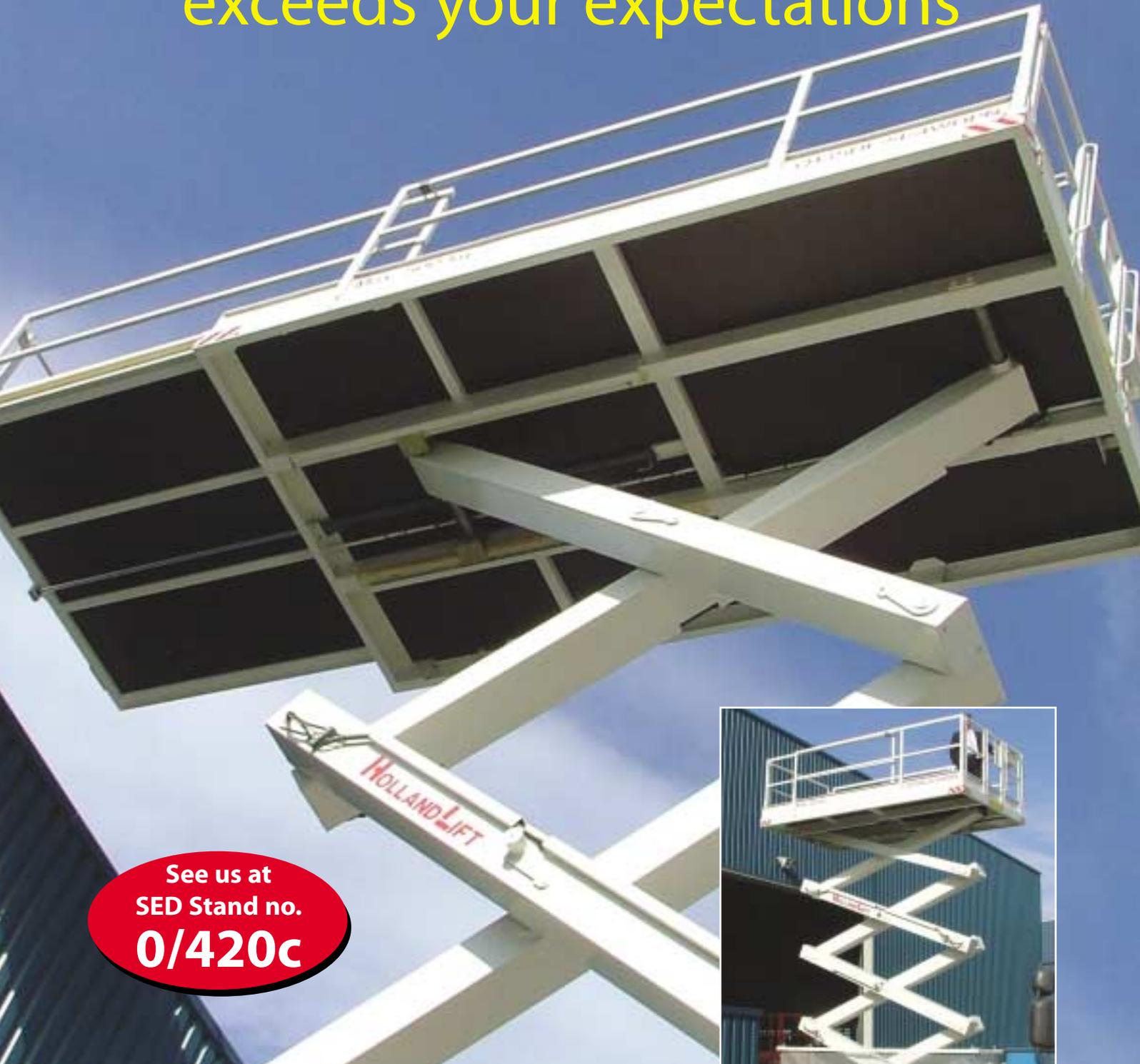
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comment

Are we so Stupid?

The UK General election is now behind us and the outcome was no surprise. The election demonstrated our inability to have a sensible "grown up" debate on a number of subjects.

We allow the red top newspapers to

limit discussion by vilifying any attempt to start a real discussion on different ways to organise some areas of our public services. Vested interests are given airtime by the media to pour scorn on any poor soul that tries to open a sensible debate. Any suggestions to slow increases in public spending results in claims that thousands of nurses, teachers and police officers will be axed! Rarely is there a thought that bureaucracy and waste could be cut first.

For instance during the campaign UCATT (the construction workers' union), a highly political group with a vested interest, issued a press release that appalled me. UCATT warned that a vote for the Conservatives would lead to an "unimaginable effect on the number of deaths and accidents on job sites". The union claimed that Tory pledges to cut red tape would mean a reduction in funding for the HSE which would result in fewer inspectors which, it concluded, would lead to a rise in accidents and deaths as contractors cut corners with site safety. Are we really that stupid?

I despair that employee representatives assume that contractors will automatically drop safety measures as soon as they think inspections are less likely; and yet in this issue we carry a report about a developer and builder that did ignore repeated warnings, resulting in the fatal fall of 37-year-old Jason Lesaux. Clearly some of us are so stupid?

The fact is though that trying to "inspect in" safe working-practices hinders progress.

Employers need to understand that sensible safety measures save money while employees need to take at least some measure of responsibility for personal safety. All too often the HSE treats employees like school children and employers as the responsible adults. If employees simply said: "No! I'm not using that. It's dangerous!" or "This isn't safe", then the number of accidents and deaths would fall swiftly.

The British/Irish tendency to rigidly enforce visible safety measures – such as hats and yellow coats – regardless of their appropriateness for a particular site, can undermine the importance of the safety message. This leads to employees colluding with employers against HSE inspections. Sadly repeated inspections did not save Jason Lesaux's life!

Finally, this is our largest issue ever and includes features on equipment that can provide significant improvements in site safety. Don't forget to stop by and see us at SED. We are hosting the Vertikal Challenge with Hiab on stand O6C. And yes... we'll be wearing our yellow coats and hard hats.

Leigh W. Sparrow

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