

IPAF Summit 2022 describes the 'evolution of safety'

3 years ago



Around 350 attendees at the 2022 Summit of the International Powered Access Federation (IPAF), at the Millennium Gloucester Hotel, Kensington, London, on 10 March 2022, heard presentations on the theme of “The Evolution of Safety”.

The IPAF Summit 2022 marked a return to in-person global events for IPAF and event partners KHL – and was the first time the event was hosted in the UK since 2017. The theme of the 2022 Summit – The Evolution of Safety – considered how IPAF’s accident reporting project, advances in technology, training and regulation have helped to provide a safer working environment for operators. The project has been central to many changes within the industry including influencing training programmes, guiding standards, and informing good practice guidance. The event addressed issues around the future for safety, and asked will we reach zero deaths while using powered access?

Peter Douglas, IPAF CEO & MD, took the stage to welcome the attendees to the first in-person Summit of his tenure – despite him taking up the post at the end of 2019. He noted that the Summit marks the ten-year anniversary of the launch of IPAF Accident Reporting, one of the most important safety initiatives of IPAF that has informed all the work IPAF does.

Next up was Norty Turner, outgoing IPAF President, who gave his own first in-person address to an IPAF Summit. “Something happens, when we come together – something chemical, so it is fantastic to see all these smiling faces, as everybody is happy to be together at this, the most well-attended Summit ever, because everyone is so pleased to be together again,” he said. “I want to welcome Karin Nars as president – the first woman president – she is a pioneer!” Addressing the assembled delegates, he added: “If you are in this room, in this industry, and someone asks what do you do? You can reply ‘I save lives’. And I think

that is just such a noble pursuit. We can all be very proud, and I want to thank everyone for being here today to come together in recognition of our shared goals and objectives.”

Mark Keily, SHEQ Director at Sunbelt Rentals and Chair of the IPAF International Safety Committee, and Brian Parker, IPAF Head of Safety & Technical, were next on the rostrum, and presented together on IPAF’s accident reporting. “It’s a sad fact that back in the 1930s, people went to work at height – for instance building the Rockefeller Centre in 1932 – in the knowledge it was a high-risk occupation and there was a good chance they might not go home safely at the end of their shift,” opened Mark. “Fast forward 90 years and things have changed so much, though we are no doubt still just a point in time in the evolution of safety, and who knows, people may look back from the future on the way we did things in 2022 and say ‘look how far we have come’.”

He added: “The more accident reporting we can drive, the more data we can gather, that will help us in our ultimate aim of making all of our workplaces safer, and to ensure that all of our people get to go home safely at the end of each day.”

Brian Parker challenged the room to consider how valuable that reporting of near misses and instances of unsafe conditions can be, pointing out that for every fatality or serious injury arising, there will have been thousands of unsafe behaviours or near-misses that have typically gone un-reported. The IPAF reporting portal is undoubtedly one of the most important ways of gathering accident data in the world – since the portal launched ten years ago, sadly we have had 584 fatal incidents reported. So to follow the Heinrich/Bird theory, 350,400 near misses, and a staggering 175.2 million unsafe acts. Sadly, the number of reports to the IPAF portal haven’t come anywhere near those numbers, he said: “Our pyramid isn’t quite there yet”.

Brian also launched Don’t Fall For It! the 2022 IPAF Targeted Safety Campaign, all about Falls From the Platform, which for the past six years of available data has been the main cause of serious injuries and deaths, at an average of 17% of all such reported incidents in the portal across that period, he said. Within that, a staggering 70% of falls for the platform were from overreaching, with 7% down to technical failure, 5% standing on guardrails, and 4% violation and behaviour – ie not following the rules, trying to get away with it. That’s 75% of such incidents that were entirely avoidable, with a further 11% down to knowing the rules and the need for pre-use inspections and checks, but just not adhering to the guidance. This is a failure of planning, usually not selecting the correct machine for the task, he added, and in many cases “operators just being lazy”.

Next, Madeleine Abas, Senior Partner at Osborn Abas Hunt, presented her “case study of an accident”. Beginning with the critical time after an accident occurs – the “golden hour”. First thing, make sure it is safe to act, she said: “I will never forget the time I received a call to say there had been a fall from height, and the first person on the scene to assist also fell... to their death. We need to ensure we have an emergency plan in place, that the area is safe, that the emergency services are informed, and that the appropriate emergency response is in place and practised regularly so that if and when the procedure is needed people know what to do.”

She also covered legal privilege, and how to conduct both internal investigations and risk assessments: “Don’t focus on what went wrong, emphasise all the good things that could have been done to prevent an accident occurring. The same principle applies to risk assessment – it is an exercise in thinking forward, to consider all the things that could go wrong, and also ask ourselves what more we could do to prevent this

happening. Overall, we need to learn from everything – especially those situations that begin with a sigh of relief that could have been so much worse – and think about what we could do better next time.”

Remi Heidelberger, Group Product Marketing Manager at Haulotte, gave an equipment manufacturer’s perspective on designing for safety, focusing on key innovations across the Haulotte product range, and how they fit into the company’s long-standing goal to be the manufacturer of the “safest powered access equipment in the world”. “Safety is in our DNA – we have no choice. Building a safe machine is not enough, we have to encourage safe practice and make this part of the way the industry operates,” he said, before talking about developing secondary guarding systems and how manufacturers can contribute to wider safety issues in and around their machines. “Safety is a state of mind – a key company objective is about changing mindsets and putting the human back into safety.”

Following up from the manufacturer perspective was Jonathan Dawson, Managing Director of Power Towers, who discussed safety improvements in the industry and in particular safety at heights under 6m. “There are 20-times more low-level access products in the construction market today than traditional powered access machines,” he pointed out. “The A-frame ladder still works, and hasn’t changed much since it was patented, but in a workplace environment, and when employers have a duty of care, there are safer and more versatile solutions available.

“Musculoskeletal disorders are estimated to cost the UK construction industry 5 million hours and £1 billion per year; adjustable low-level access platforms are quicker – and if you work smarter, you tend to work safer as well. We need to make equipment delivery and portability easier, drive more sharing between contractors and trades on sites in terms of both financial savings and from a sustainability angle,” he said. “We also need to work out how to make familiarisation and equipment training more straightforward by comparison with ladders or scaffold towers, how can we make inspections easier?”

Dr Shaun Lundy, Director of Strategy and Innovation at Tetra Consulting, presented on safety and behaviour in “a changing workforce – and what it means for safety”. “Innovation in health & safety thinking is a sure way to reduce incident rates, which remain stubbornly high,” he said.

“Embracing generational diversity, new technology and understanding the negative effects of national skills shortages and emerging risks are all key. In future there should be an increasing focus on wellbeing and mental health, as well as a business and professional ethics consideration rather than a regulatory or legislative onus. People are solutions, not part of the problem. We must focus on positives over negatives, and ethics over bureaucracy – think about why we do things, focus on all risks equally, and don’t allow the preponderance of minor risks to leave a blind spot over major risks.

“What matters most is starting conversations, encouraging engagement and being a good communicator. We want to avoid ‘groupthink’ and be democratic in approach,” he concluded, proposing a five-step plan to: Identify health & safety issues; consult with staff; disseminate information; report good news; and acknowledge safe behaviours.

In the afternoon session, Oana Samoila, Key Accounts Sales Manager of AlmaCrawler, gave insights into the way the human mind learns, through a mix of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic methods. “So why is storytelling so important to training and safety? It is accurate – when telling a story, the listener is instinctively trying to make sense of what they are being told,” she said. “Without storytelling, the human brain often finds it difficult to put the listener into the context being explained, which makes retaining

information such as safety guidance or training instruction much harder. Giving information in a way that makes it more relatable helps retention.” Storytelling also provides an opportunity for risk-free experimentation, allowing people to enter scenarios and consider “what would you have done”, she added.

Martin Hall, Safety Health & Environment Director at Morgan Sindall, gave a talk entitled “Safety: A contractor’s view.” He covered the myriad challenges he has as a contractor, including dropped objects, combating poor safety practices on site, and problems with “skill fade” even among experienced operators and supervisors. He talked about how the industry can adopt and exceed “minimum standards” of safety.

Another key point he raised concerned the fact that many users still struggle to accurately assess risk, and especially experienced operators who feel that “common accidents cannot happen to them”. A focus on considering risks of dropped objects and materials, including properly designed exclusion zones, he added: “Rather than zero accidents we are shifting the emphasis on to 100% safe.” Innovation from the wider powered access industry is “inspirational”, he concluded.

Paul Roddis, IPAF Training Manager, gave a timeline of developments in IPAF training, highlighting the acceleration in output of new training course and digital innovations, particularly during the pandemic when convenience, flexibility and remote learning all helped increase uptake of IPAF training. He explained how important the IPAF Accident Reporting portal and the data gathered has been in helping to direct resources and influence the content of all of the training updates in recent years.

IPAF needs to “change people’s mindset” when it comes to familiarisation, as it is fundamental to safety and teaches knowledge that can’t be imparted via standardised operator training. He praised the ePAL mobile app for operators and managers, launched last year as “perhaps the greatest innovation IPAF has ever introduced”, and talked about how his team keeps abreast of changes and updates across 63 variations of the IPAF operator course in 14 different languages, against a backdrop of sustained growth in demand over the past ten years.

A key challenge is replicating that growth in demand for IPAF’s MEWPs for Managers course, he said, giving examples of trained operators doing it wrong, and managers not knowing it was wrong, and trained operators pointing out errors in planning and management, but not being listened to. “We are never going to hit our goal of zero falls, unless we act on this,” he concluded.

The Summit concluded with a panel discussion, asking industry leaders how they foster safety in their business. Pedro Torres, CEO of Riwal, opened: “We have safety KPIs, weekly meetings where we talk safety, we have legislation, and we also have a matrix of safety escalations – but we try and attach a value to safety, because in the end, we rent safety, we don’t just rent machines. We need to improve near miss reporting and in fact the numbers across accident reporting from all countries where we operate.”

Andy Studdert, ex IPAF President and CEO, formerly of NES Rentals and Cramo, said: “The culture of work is changing all the time; a lot of people coming into our industry over the past ten years have a different ethic – we have to remember society is shifting and we have to change the message and the way we say it accordingly.” Paul Rankin, Powered Access Division, Chief Operating Officer at LOXAM, agreed: “An open environment is key, and if speaking out as an operator reaches the point where it is considered as whistle-blowing, then we as managers, as individuals, need to realise the culture we have created is wrong.” Will Temple, Head of Powered Access, Sunbelt Rentals, echoed the sentiments of the other panellists: “You

need to create an environment of communication and trust – managers properly engaging. If you don't align with safety policy on the ground, you won't achieve what you're trying to."

Panel chair Murray Pollok, Editorial Director of event co-host KHL Group, asked who is driving safety in our industry? Pedro Torres said "everybody is driving it, including our customers", while Paul Rankin countered: "What worries me is those of our customers who don't see the value of what we offer in terms of safety." Will Temple said: "Our customers play a huge part and it is incumbent upon us to make sure we are listening, understanding and responding to what they are saying to us."

Finally, the panel was asked, "If you could change just one thing, what would it be?" To which Paul Rankin responded: "A fundamental problem for me is that you can do your training one day on a smaller boom lift and the next day be on a 40-metre-plus machine? We need to look at this issue and what we can do to address it."

Will Temple was concerned the industry is "focused too much on training, not enough on demonstrating competence. How many logbooks are being completed and checked? I think we would be disappointed. I think this speaks to what Paul has said, as we need to think about how we demonstrate experience."

Pedro Torres said: "We should prioritise awareness of accidents, providing information to companies, to CEOs about accidents in their country or region, to build awareness and engagement." Andy Studdert concluded: "A wider issue would be the problems in our industry that haven't improved in years, decades even – such as the use of the harness. We need to focus first on the biggest priority, fix it, then move on to the next."

Dinolift's Karin Nars, newly confirmed as IPAF President, gave a closing address. "We should all take pride in being a global organisation, committed to improving safety in our industry – we should never lose sight of who we are," she said. "As Madeleine Abas said 'any unsafe situation is an opportunity to learn how could we do better' but also I have learned that we should always recognise the positive things we have done in our industry and celebrate these. We are all ambassadors for safety."

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