

Safety Alert

Worker seriously injured by falling excavator bucket

The purpose of this Safety Alert is to highlight common industry practice of transporting excavator attachments in a large excavator bucket, and the risk associated with the attachments dislodging and causing serious injury if not securely restrained.

Background

A worker was seriously injured at a construction site in Darwin after an excavator bucket fell and hit them. The worker was getting ready to pressure-wash the excavator tracks before it was loaded for transport on a float.

The excavator operator did not see the worker while moving the excavator arm. There were three smaller buckets sitting on top of the main bucket, and they were not secured.

When the operator suddenly noticed the worker, they stopped quickly. This caused the main bucket to jerk, and one of the smaller buckets fell off and struck the worker.



Image: The excavator and buckets in situ after the incident.

Possible contributing factors

- An exclusion zone was not established for the excavator and communication between the operator, and the injured worker was unclear.
- The injured worker was standing in a blind spot in the excavator's slew radius.
- The smaller buckets were not restrained while sitting on top of the main bucket.

Action required

- Mobile plant attachments should be restrained on the deck of the float as outlined in the Load Restraint Guide 2025 (see image below).
 - If smaller attachments are being transported in a larger bucket, these attachments must be securely restrained to the bucket carrying them.
- Before operating any mobile plant, the operator and any workers must establish a system of communication before any work starts, this system should:
 - Stop workers from approaching the mobile plant until the operator has established visual contact and has signalled that it is safe to approach.
 - If an operator has signalled a worker to approach, the operator should stop the equipment, put it in a safe mode, and take their hands off the controls.
 - If the operator loses sight of the worker, they should stop operations until they re-establish visual contact with the worker.
- Workers should never approach mobile plant and assume that the operator can see them.
- Workers should never stand under or near a suspended load in case of equipment malfunction or operator error.

✓ Restrain auxiliary components (buckets, blades, rippers, etc.) on the deck using containment and/or tie-down/direct restraint – *Figure 271*.

Figure 271 Restraint of auxiliary components

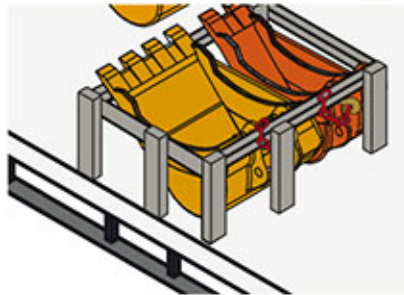


Image: The Load Restraint Guide 2025 recommends restraining the attachments on the deck.

Further information

For further information, please refer to the following:

Safety Alert

- [Securely restrain excavator buckets and attachments before transportation](#)

Codes of Practice

- [How to manage health and safety risks](#)
- [Managing the risks of plant at the workplace](#)

Guidance publications

- [Load Restraint Guide 2025](#) (National Heavy Vehicle Regulator)

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