

Legal information about guillotine maintenance

There tends to be some confusion among employers and users of 'powered guillotines' as to the legal position regarding maintenance. "Is it compulsory?", "I don't use mine very often, does it still require 6 monthly servicing/certification"? I'm frequently asked these type of questions. Down the years I've had a number of communications and conversations with HSE inspectors and other experts as to what the actual legal position is.

Basically in 1979 the HSE realised that users and even so called experts might not be able to fully assess all of the risks and dangers associated with guillotines and other print industry related equipment and accordingly formed a committee known as PIAC, with members nominated by the CBI and the TUC, and appointed by the HSC to work together with the HSE to advise the industry on health and safety.

Confusion arises in that the document dealing with guillotine safety, commonly known as PIAC1999 (ISBN 978 0 7176 1707 4) states in the introduction that it is 'guidance' and that 'it is not compulsory' and you are 'free to take other action'. Confusingly it then states that if you do follow the guidance you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law. The ambiguity consequently leads some owners/operators to conclude there is no specific legal requirement as to the extent of the maintenance they undertake, putting themselves and their operators at possible risk of severe injury.

In fact PIAC1999 should be considered 'the' risk assessment for all guillotines, which, having been produced by the HSE carries the highest merit, failure to comply leaves the owner /operator liable to prosecution under risk assessment law and other less well known statutory legislation. In the words of one inspector I spoke to 'the only deviation from PIAC1999 that would be acceptable would be for additional inspections, servicing and/or procedures, not less'.

In relation to the Ideal Electric and Hydraulic Guillotines we supply the requirement is for these to be serviced, safety tested and certificated to the PIAC standard at six monthly intervals.

Some of the risks posed by guillotines not properly maintained are:

- 1) the blade slipping/falling down when stationary, due to brake, clutch or linkage failure etc., this could result in serious injury to the operators hands/wrists/arms.
- 2) the blade stopping below the clamp, or the clamp over-travelling up above the blade, leaving the blade's cutting edge exposed in the guillotine jaws, again potentially serious for the operator.
- 3) the guillotine failing to stop correctly at the end of a cutting cycle, and automatically commencing a second whilst the unsuspecting operator is removing cut work, again risking severe injury.

These are a few of the severest eventualities, the risk of these occurring can be reduced considerably by efficient service, inspection, and operational care and observance.

E&OE - The foregoing is based on our long experience of the industry, conversations with relevantly knowledgeable individuals and available information. It is intended as a guide only into often expressed confusion regarding the legal requirement for guillotine maintenance and relationship to risk assessment law. You should satisfy yourself with the content before basing any decisions on the information.

PIACC1999 (ISBN 978 0 7176 1707 4) is crucial reading for anyone intending to purchase or use a power operated guillotine. A copy can be downloaded FOC from the HSE web site.