

Proposed Ban on Semi-Automatic Quick Couplers

Workplace injuries and fatalities due to quick coupler-related incidents may soon be a thing of the past if expected legislation is introduced into NSW, Australia. A discussion paper recently released for public comment by NSW Government agency, WorkCover, announces the proposed phasing out of semi-automatic quick couplers by the end of 2013.

With two people dying in the first few months of 2012 due to quick coupler-related incidents, the strong message and push is to get all worksites using fully automatic quick couplers as soon as possible to prevent further fatalities.

Fatalities like these can happen when the attachment safety pin is not used (which is up to 50% of the machines, according to WorkCover NSW) or if the pin is not engaged correctly, explains Jeremy Doherty, managing director of Doherty Couplers and Attachments.

“The big issue with the original quick coupler design is it relies on the operator getting out of the excavator or backhoe to disengage the safety pin, moving the arm to the new attachment, getting out again to reengage the safety pin before they can then get on with the job,” says Doherty. “When you consider any normal job will require changing attachments multiple times throughout the day, you can see how these accidents happen.”

As a result Doherty designed the Snaplock+ range ensuring safety was paramount. The Snaplock+ Coupler is now one of the few quick couplers world-wide fully compliant to Australian Standard AS4772-2008, European EN474 Standards, expected forth coming ISO international standards and all major contractor policies. Its key feature is its Dual Pin Locking (DPL) system ensuring attachments remain securely engaged on both pins in the event of loss of engagement force, advises Doherty.

“The Snaplock+ Keypad further ensures the operator has complete control of the entire operation by using a personalised code to lock and unlock attachments on the job.”

With an established office in Melbourne, Doherty have also recently set up base in Sydney to help educate companies on the options available to them and to ensure their attachments are compliant before the changes take place. Subject to approval, WorkCover will commence action from 2014 to secure compliance with these requirements which also applies to quick couplers imported into NSW. And while WorkCover will allow semi-automatic quick couplers fitted on machines before 31st December 2013, there will be strict requirements on the reselling of these attachments.

“The proposed ban is great news for the safety of our industry,” says Doherty. “The key question contractors need to be asking is whether or not they're compliant. If not it makes more sense to ditch the semi-automatic and install a fully-automatic quick coupler now, before they're forced to.”

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Reference: <http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au/formspublications/publications/Documents/safe-use-quick-hitches-excavators-safety-alert-3301.pdf>

<http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au/aboutus/newsroom/Pages/Injurypromptsurgentexcavatorsafetywarning.aspx>