

BHTA GUIDANCE

Hoist/Sling Compatibility

Introduction

A great deal of confusion and anxiety exists regarding the issue of mixing slings and hoists from different manufacturers and has been an issue of much controversy.

In order to apply the CE Mark, all manufacturers are required under MDD 93/42 EEC “to reduce the risk associated with a product to an acceptable level”. As the number and variety of slings and hoists on the market increases so the risk of potentially dangerous combinations increase. There is no regulatory reason that a sling must come from the same manufacturer as the hoist.

Most hoist manufacturers in the UK recommend the use of their own slings, whilst this does reduce the risk of non – compatibility it also reduces flexibility when assessing an individual clients needs.

Specialist sling manufacturers offer designs compatible with a variety of hoists. Some sling suppliers make claim that their slings are compatible with any “standard” carry/spreader bar. This can be a misleading and potentially dangerous claim. Whilst the spreader bar configuration does often appear similar, the geometry of the suspension points can be different. More importantly, the sling shape, length of straps and method of head support can vary enormously, adding to the risk potential.

It is important that the sling supplied has been designed to offer the client maximum safety with the particular spreader bar configuration of the hoist in use and that a risk assessment has been conducted.

Legally and practically it is difficult for any manufacturer to offer an opinion on compatibility without on site assessment, most reputable companies will advise that the responsibility is with an assessor and offer assistance with on site assessment.

These guidance notes are produced to clarify the issues and to ensure best practice.

1. For a sling to be assessed as compatible with a hoist, a risk assessment should be conducted.
2. Generally it is safe to use those slings recommended for use by the hoist manufacturer, however a risk assessment is recommended.

3. Slings manufactured by a specialist supplier should have specific advice regarding compatibility. Due to the increasing variety of designs available it is unlikely they will have a sling that is compatible with all makes of hoist.
4. Just because a sling has similar attachment method to the recommended by the hoist manufacturer, it does not mean it is compatible with that hoist. There are several other considerations.

Some things to look out for!

Distance of Client from spreader bar:

Too close – Risk of impact with spreader bar, reduced lowering capacity e.g. hard to pick up from the floor or bath etc.

Too far away – Reduced lift, insufficient clearance under client over obstacles.

Angle of client in relation to vertical:

Too far reclined – Risk of neck injury or backwards inversion. Risk to the carer when positioning client in chair.

Too far forward – Risk of forwards inversion or head impact with spreader bar.

Posture of client:

Narrower suspension points can cause compression, leading to aspiratal problems, skeletal injury, upper body and leg body and leg pressure ulcers and pain.

Wider suspension points can cause stability problems, lower body pressure ulcers, “jack-knifing” through widened aperture.

(The above conditions are affected by the size and shape of the sling, the length of the straps, the shape and configuration of the carry bar and suspension points. The environment where the hoist is to be used and the size and condition of the client can also influence compatibility. A competent person must individually assess this, on site).

5. Once satisfied that the sling and hoist combination is the right one for your Client you must document the reasons and the actions you have taken in assessing the risk.
6. If you are still unsure, ask for specific written confirmation from the supplying company, this will normally entail a joint visit with a representative, or refer the matter to your manual handling safety officer.
7. Once the combination is assessed as safe you should always train carers and users in the use of the hoist and sling combination.

Legal

1. Slings and hoists are classified as Class1 Medical Devices and shall, in all cases, carry the CE mark and meet the essential requirements of the Medical Devices Directive.
2. Occupational Therapists and Nurses make risk assessments on a daily basis when recommending client equipment. Most authority Legal Departments recommend that a thorough and documented assessment should be carried out so that, should an incident occur, proof exists that all reasonable steps were taken to ensure Client and Carer safety.

Risk assessment is good practice for all equipment not just hoist and sling combinations.

3. Common Law principles mean that there is a “Duty of Care” towards both employees and clients when providing or using equipment.
4. The Duty of Care means that staff must take responsible care to avoid acts that endanger either employees or service users.
5. PUWER '98 regulations require that: The equipment is appropriate to the task and that carers have adequate training (including use of the hoist, the sling and the combination). They should also be advised of regular checks to be conducted and who should be contacted in the event of a problem.

SUMMARY

There is no such thing as a “Standard Carry Bar” or a sling that can be used on any hoist.

Assessment should be individually conducted and documented by a competent person with due consideration to the clients safety and comfort, the carers safety, the task, and the environment.

Carers should be trained to use equipment competently.

If in doubt seek the advice of the equipment supplier or refer the matter to your manual handling safety officer.

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